CONSTRUCTING SHADY GROVE: TROUBLES TALK AND COMMUNITY
FORMATION IN SENIOR PUBLIC HOUSING

By

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Community has long been a topic of great interest in lay, sociological, and

gerontological literature. However, community has rarely been approached analytically in

social interactional terms. This dissertation sets out to do just this. Utilizing data

gathered from ethnographic field work performed in a senior public housing

neighborhood, my findings suggest that community is formed through the sharing of

concerns and problems common to the neighborhood by tenants, which I term "troubles

talk." In locating community in talk and interaction, we are able to both empirically

document its existence and see the actual operation of community in place.

CHAPTER 1
HOW SHADY GROVE BECAME A SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEM

It has been said that community increasingly eludes contemporary life. In what has been described as a postmodern world, one without grounding, many strive to enhance nostalgic images of a strong communal past (Bellah 1985; Langdon 1994; Lasch 1979). We see this clearly in the urban design movement of neo-traditionalism, perhaps best exemplified in residential settings such as Seaside, the perfect "community" located in the Florida panhandle that served as the backdrop for <u>The Truman Show</u>. Community enchants us more and more as we perceive it as more evanescent as ever. Hazan (1990) notes, "we use it to describe almost any localized group of individuals who share an identifiable culturally acknowledged common denominator" (p. 6). Research discerns it in groups as diverse as Jews (Wirth 1928), lesbians and gays (Krieger 1983; Phelan 1994), Native Americans (Dozier 1966), the elderly (Eckert 1983; Jacobs 1974; Hochschild 1973; Keith 1980; Ross 1977), and the computer-mediated communication of the Internet.

Desire aside, is there anything that people do to exemplify community? If we don't take for granted that community is simply "there" in a local setting, how is its existence conveyed? What is the actual operation of community in place? What is it exactly in social interactional terms? Similar to family and homelessness, community has become a social form that is treated as phenomenologically self-evident. We all know what community is, after all, do we not? At least, we surely know it when we see it. But

what do we observe when we see it? Following Gubrium and Holstein (1997), we need to ask how community is practically achieved in everyday life.

These are the questions that guided the research for this dissertation. Rather than take community for granted as a phenomena of social life--my aim has been to focus on what people do to build and sustain the community of which they are a part. Community, in other words, is not so much a site, location, and collection of participants, as it is the activity that participants engage in constructing a site and location into a collectivity they share.

Orienting to the "Doing" of Community

As a point of departure, it might be helpful to actually observe an example of community in operation. In particular, how is it that in a residential setting of elderly, that I call "Shady Grove," participants give evidence of what makes them a community and not merely a collection of individual residents?

My approach began to take shape one day as I was walking by a quiet city park thinking about the project. The park was surrounded on all sides by busy streets and large apartment complexes of some 20 separate buildings. As usual there were a number of people in the small park consisting, in this case mostly of children frolicking on the playground equipment and students studying or just relaxing, some playing frisbee. Additionally, there were a number of elderly people, both men and women, sitting on the benches around the park. I figured that the park would be a nice place to study and to at least achieve some sort of idea concerning what was being discussed in the difficult texts I was reading, so I lay down on the grass near two of the older people.

As I began to read, I overheard two gentleman talking. Since one of my specializations is aging, I decided that it would be interesting to listen carefully to what these seniors were talking about. I figured that I might learn something about the lives behind all those numbers I was reading about. Here's a facsimile of what transpired.

"Tom, do you believe what that woman did yesterday?" the older man in jeans and a flannel shirt asked the other, who was very well dressed in khakis, a nice oxford shirt, and a blazer.

"No, but I can guess," the other replied.

"Let me tell you, she comes running out of her unit, screaming that the boogie-man or something is coming after her. Everybody comes running out themselves to see what is going on and she's still running around, screaming at the top of her lungs 'He's coming. He's coming. Everyone run.' I still have no idea what she was talking about, I don't think anyone does, Tom," the man in the flannel shirt continued.

"None of that surprises me, Eric," Tom stated, "Larry and Lisa were over at my apartment the other day, I think it was earlier in the week, maybe Tuesday, and we talked about Laura. That shouldn't surprise you. Everyone does, don't they?" he noted as he laughed heartily. "We've decided that she is just crazy. What can you do. She goes running around all the time telling people that something in her unit is out to get her, that the people in the building are after her. She's losing it, I tell ya, and she needs to go to a nursing home. She's just a pain-in-the-ass as it is. I think we're going to have to do something about her. I know she's part of us and all. Lived here for a long time but she

just doesn't belong here anymore. Gonna drive everyone crazy as it is," he laughed,

"crazier than her, I guess."

As I listened to this exchange, I asked myself, "Who are these people?" I think,

"old people aren't supposed to say things like that about each other, are they?" My rather

romanticized view of later life informed me that the elderly are generous with and pleasant

to each other. So I decided to keep listening, thinking that I might learn something more

complex than the view I held.

The men continued. "You know, I've got my own problems, without having to

worry about hers," Tom commented as he stood up, obviously agitated:

> They say I've got angina or something in my heart and my eyes are going bad. I
> went to take my driver's license test the other day, and guess what? I failed! You
> know I've had arthritis for a long time. I'm just plain sick and tired of her. They
> ought to put her in a nursing home. It would do all of us a lot of good, let me tell
> you.

Eric looked contemplative for a moment, seated there with his head resting on his

hand held at the top of his cane.

> I think you're right Tom. I'm going to report her to the housing authority so they
> can do something about her. I think it's in both her and our interest, you know all
> of us residents, that she leave. Maybe they can contact her family or something of
> that sort. I've never heard her talk about her family though, I hope she has one. I
> know my family doesn't want anything to do with me anymore, just hoping I stay
> quiet on my Social Security check. They put me in here so they wouldn't have to
> worry about me anymore. So far it's worked.

They both laughed. Tom responded like this:

> I know exactly what you mean. Some of these people out here have families
> though and they still live here. How about Mrs. Thompson? I don't know if
> you've heard about this one. Her daughter comes to see her about a month ago
> and she hasn't left yet. She keeps telling people that she's going to leave every

other day. People keep giving her that little leeway 'cause she's about three bricks shy of a load too.

Tom continued, still laughing, "But I'm going to report her too, just like the other lady. What's her name? Ms. Hegel? Yeah, that's right. She got kicked out and so should Mrs. Thompson. Thanks for reminding me, I'm going to go do that right now." Eric then nodded in agreement, "You get going Tom, before she leaves." He laughed as he watched Tom rise from the bench and walk quickly towards their apartment building with a goal in mind.

As I continued to sit there, acting as if I were reading, I wondered to myself, "so this is what old people talk about? They've got problems just like me. I can't get any funding, and I swear some of my own friends are crazy as well." I chuckled to myself as I started thinking about the problems of these strangers in terms of mine. But then I wondered again: Is this idle gossip, something just amusing to me because it strongly reflects some of my own sentiments? Or is there something here? Am I hearing these men share ideas about who they are and the other residents are, as parts of a world they share? Is this talk as much actively constructing that world, as it comments upon it?

Maybe this isn't just talk. I'm still not sure. Nothing that important seems to have been said. An annoying neighbor was discussed who sounds as if she might be at the onset of Alzheimer's disease. The men have problems with their health. One man is suffering from angina. Since they seem to be living in a public housing complex for the elderly, they're complaining about that, too. Like many their age, they have quite a few other troubles weighing on them. But maybe that is all.

We all have troubles. Think about when we sit and talk. What do we talk about? We talk about problems with the boss, about problems at home, or if you're a teenager talking with friends, you might talk about all the troubles you're having with your parents. Lots of "troubles talk." Are troubles the only thing that troubles talk is about? By talking about our troubles, are we not making connections with others involved in the conversation? As Tom and Eric shared their troubles they not only share knowledge, but communicate a world they hold in common. Troubles talk establishes a link between speakers as they communicate, "oh yeah, I know what you're talking about, I have the same problems." Do such statements create a community?

These were my thoughts and emerging ideas as I reflected on the talk I overheard that day in the park. As I continued to consider this line of thinking, it occurred to me that what Tim and Eric were doing that day was not just sharing gossip, but "doing" community. In their very ordinary words, they were giving shape--for better or worse--to what they figured they were, or should be, writ large, with their neighbors in the apartment complex.

From Individual Hassles to Shared Troubles

According to recent research in aging, and the received wisdom in general in this area, the elderly and those associated with them have more troubles than others. Referred to as "hassles" in gerontological research, recent literature on this has exploded. Mainly, it focuses on caregiving (Kinney, Stephens, and Norris 1995) and widowhood (Voyer and Vezina 1995) as they affect hassles or troubles. Indeed, scales have been developed to actually measure hassles, such as the appropriately named "Hassles Scale" (Kanner et al.

1981), and the "Caregiving Hassles and Uplifts Scale" (Kinney and Stephens 1989a, 1989b). While these measures provide a picture of reported troubles, or hassles as the case might be, they tell us very little about what people do socially in communicating them. The increasing interest in troubles in gerontology appears to be headed in a direction likely to completely overlook their constructed character. Measuring hassles individualizes them and can only lead to portrayals of what is personally undesirable in life, not what constructs it.

The two elderly men discussed earlier certainly do seem to be hassled. But they just don't have hassles; they also are <u>sharing</u> them. The sharing of these troubles gives shape to a shared existence. In communicating troubles, they give life to something greater than their individual difficulties. The "woman who runs around crazy" is a trouble that links them, which in being spoken, gives life to something they share. This "something" is the everyday reality of community.

Could it be that the two men are referring to a community built on troubles, disagreements, and if you wish, hassles? They seem to have coinciding troubles and troubles talk was certainly central to their conversation. Do troubles unite these men as much as they are a source of annoyance in their lives?

Community has traditionally not only signified ongoing social interaction, but also location, something not readily apparent in my initial musings about the link between troubles talk and community construction. But what is community in terms of geographical location? Community signifies common places, domains of everyday life that assign identities to those who live, work, or otherwise spend time there. But geography

can only be a shorthand for "we-ness," for a set of common beliefs or horizons of meanings. A neighborhood, for example, can represent the geographic and social boundaries of identity and interaction for residents, but it doesn't reveal the interactive "stuff" of community, only its ostensible location. Members of an organizational unit can come to view their regular places of work as the layout of their common lives as co-workers. But this must be mediated by social interaction, so that location actually signals community.

This figured significantly in the background to my concerns with the community life of the apartment complex I was soon to call Shady Grove, where my field work was eventually conducted. My sense was that because it was a geographically-designated housing complex, the elderly residing there would convey some sense of who they were in terms of location, organize their daily lives in some degree along geographic lines and would accordingly relate to commonly recognizable rights and obligations pertinent to the place. But from this perspective, after several weeks of fieldwork at Shady Grove, I was close to concluding that I was seeing nothing more than a collection of individuals housed in proximity to each other, with very little in common, exhibiting inconsequential and limited social interaction, the opposite of which I took to be the foundation of community life.

As I began to revisit and to rethink what I was hearing from the residents, especially the troubles talk that I'd initially overheard listening to residents Tom and Eric in the park, I began to discover that there was much more to community life than living in juxtaposed units. I began to consider the possibility that by engaging in troubles talk, the

residents were actually <u>doing</u> community--before my very eyes and ears! Community was

coming alive, in practice, in the communication of shared troubles. In time, in the course

of my fieldwork, it became apparent that much of the everyday discussion among Shady

Grove residents was organized around how, say, so-and-so was harassing a neighbor, how

another resident was so wonderful in helping others, or how many residents had "gone

downhill" recently. Seemingly, when the residents talked about each other, they were

talking into everyday reality common communicated problems of the neighborhood.

Community was being actually developed in their talk of troubles, a notion that other

community sociologists seemed to be ignoring. In essence, I began to consider that

community was actively constructed through talk and interactions which, in this case,

were centered on troubles talk.

In retrospect, this should have come as no surprise to me as I recall that on my

first day in speaking with the Executive Director of the housing authority which managed

Shady Grove, Ms. Thompson, she explained:

> Oooh, they [the residents] will call you all the time. And God, you are going to
> have to listen to their stories over and over and over. All these people do is
> complain, Chris. Seems like all they've got are troubles.

How prescient that comment--all they've got are troubles--was going to be.

Without knowing exactly what she was saying sociologically about life in Shady Grove,

Thompson was pointing to the interactive grist of community life and, in her way,

confirming what I was soon to develop into a fuller and more positive story.

Orienting to Community Theory

The study of community has a rich history. The classic sociological concern stems from the Industrial Revolution (Calhoun 1978, 1980). The leading theme was that European social life was headed in a direction away from community and toward an individualized social order (Durkheim [1893] 1964; Maine 1871; Marx and Engles [1848] 1948; Spencer [1862] 1880) . According to Gusfield (1978), this centered on the common concern among social thinkers for the loss of community and, like contemporary concern, signaled a desire for a return to a folk-like, traditional social life. Early sociologists focused on related changes brought about by the industrial and democratic revolutions and the rapid decline of "primary" association into an anonymous form of life

In the new world spawned by the Industrial Revolution, social life was described as being centered on the equality of individuals and secular association. The nostalgic debate in social theory associated with this change created a language of community; focused especially on its moral dimensions. Calhoun (1980) explains it this way:

> The language of community grew up as a demand for more personal and more moral relations among people as well as a descriptive category . . . community was moral in that people were not expected to be in this view, perfect in and of themselves, but rather more perfect as they were better integrated into webs of social commitments, rules, and relations. (P. 100)

Considered by most as "the father of the typological tradition [of community] in sociology" (Poplin 1979:125), Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) formulated a general framework for viewing the change built on his well-known distinction between "Gemeinschaft" and "Gesellschaft." Tönnies formulates the distinction in terms, "of the experiential vs. structuralist aspects of community" (Calhoun 1980:108). As a result, Tönnies asserts that

community is founded on the social relationships built on natural and human wills. In doing so, he assumes that the natural rests on an understanding and unity of a group and that the human, or rational will, depends on the goal of reaching a desirable and attainable end (Poplin 1979).

Tonnies' idea of a human community built upon relationships and goal attachment was soon challenged by a new theory born out of the slums of Chicago. In the early to mid-20th century, Robert Park and his so-called Chicago School formulated a new "ecological" approach to community. Not as wistful as earlier European approaches to community, it focused on the actual social and spatial underpinnings of community formation. The approach entailed empirical investigations into the central urban core of the city. Poplin (1979) asserts that "it becomes the task of the human ecologists to discover basic patterns of city growth and to explain why cities tend to take on characteristic spatial organizations" (p. 83). Park (1936, 1938, 1952) and his followers introduced an important and explicitly American approach to the study of community that remains an important framework for research.

Another direction came with more constructionist thinking. Suttles (1972), extending Park's ecological propositions, focused his attention on what he termed the defended localized neighborhood:

> One of the aims of [The Social Construction of Community] has been to approach the local residential urban community as a response of territorial populations to their environment rather than to look at it as a remnant of a more fragmented and localized community. (P. 234)

In short, Suttles' approach adds a cognitive element to the ecological perspective. His theory is that neighborhoods construct their own sense of community through the development of symbolic defenses of territorial associations.

In aging research we have seen the constructionist approach to community studies on a more micro level, most notably in the work of Arlie Hochschild. Her work is perhaps best exemplified in The Unexpected Community (1973). Using data gathered from an extensive ethnography of a senior public housing building in California, she pays particular attention to the resources employed by the residents as they subjectively construct and give meaning to their community.

While certain social scientists, such as Hochschild, see community in social interactional terms, environmental and urban design have historically been entrusted with both the preservation and production of community (Buder 1990; Hall 1990; Morris 1990). Urban planner Jane Jacobs (1961) tells us of the growth of the American city and its proverbial "death" through a declining urban core. Researchers following in this tradition continue to see community as a phenomena that is both created and maintained through proper environmental design (see Calthorpe 1993; Garreau 1991; Rowe 1991). Gerontological concerns with community have followed a similar path by concentrating on community enhancement through proper design (Howell 1980; Lawton 1980; Regnier 1994).

How does this community theorizing relate to my own approach to the constructed function of troubles talk? The everyday organization of troubles has itself increasingly become a focus of research. However, research on troubles talk is rarely linked with the

issue of community construction. Except for empirical research on the "homeless community," sociological attention has not specifically focused on troubles as making a constructive contribution to social life. Rather, the usual social problems context in which troubles figure as a destabilizing agent of social life has dominated.

Much of the sociological research on troubles falls under the general theoretical rubric of "social problems work." Emerging from a social constructionist stance (see Kitsuse and Spector 1973, 1975), social problems work has developed into a dynamic new approach to the study of social problems. The argument is that social problems are not self-evident but are socially constructed. This has led to empirical studies of the construction of social problems centered on spouse abuse (Loseke 1992), mental illness (Emerson, Rochford, and Shaw 1983; Kahne and Schwartz 1977; Holstein 1993), HIV (Miller and Silverman 1995), work incentive programs (Miller 1990) and family therapy (Gubrium 1992). Its theoretical foundation is a microscopic social constructionism stemming from Robert Emerson's and Sheldon Messinger's (1977) proposition that troubles are sociological, not personal. Troubles are viewed as following a socio-historical progression towards becoming full-blown social problems. The social problems work effort in this area views the final stage in the process as notably organizational, where institutional auspices mediate the constraints of troubles along organizational lines.

Beyond limited work in conversation analysis, the everyday nature of troubles talk has not been appreciated as a means through which troubles are worked out (see Jefferson 1984, 1988; Jefferson and Lee 1981, 1992). If the focus becomes the construction of trouble through everyday talk, not its historical progression towards a widely recognized

social problem, then a question that can certainly be asked is what are people doing when they talk about their troubles? Following Maynard and Marlaire's (1993) lead, I suggest that it is entirely possible that situational troubles talk is a means through which social interaction and integration can be initiated, extended, and elaborated. In short, that an integrated community can be practically accomplished and socially organized by people as an ongoing social form through "simple" talk about their everyday troubles. In talking of Ms. Hegel, Mrs. Thompson, and that "crazy woman," Eric and Tom have worked to talk a community into being.

Using data gathered from fieldwork performed in Shady Grove, this dissertation documents how talk of troubles serves to construct and exemplify community. The focus is on the actual activities of those whom I come to call Shady Grovers, or Grovers for short, as they work to build, sustain, and elaborate the community that exists in their neighborhood. By actively sharing their troubles with other residents and with me, the residents of Shady Grove formed a community that one only had to listen to to see.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 2 provides an extended critique and discussion of relevant literature as it relates to troubles talk and community formation. Classical sociological concerns with community are considered in-depth, as well as an extensive discussion of a sociology of troubles and social problems work. Chapter 3 extends theoretical concerns into methodological issues of fieldwork. Special attention is payed to the everyday troubles of the fieldworker as he or she negotiates what many have discerned as the "stages of fieldwork."

In Chapter 4, attention is focused on the role that social typing plays into troubles talk and everyday community work by the Grovers. By knowing and <u>sharing</u> knowledge of commonly known and taken for granted identities formed around troubles, residents work to establish a social order that to enhances a sense of solidarity.

Chapter 5 turns our attention to the unfolding story of two residents, and their special place in the troubles talk of Shady Grove. Sources of both ridicule and concern, the troubles talk of these two is an active ingredient in the stuff that builds community.

Utilizing contemporary theories of identity politics and social movements, the sixth chapter presents an argument concerning socio-cultural conflict, encounters with outside groups, and identity group politics in The Grove.

The final substantive chapter, "Ethnographic Fieldwork and the Enhancement of Community in Shady Grove," explores the relations between the active member of a research site and the fieldworker and the means through which this urges emergent phenomenon, such as community among the Shady Grovers, to become increasingly visible. Empirical evidence is presented that shows the means through which I both embraced and enhanced community in the Grove.

In conclusion, the study is briefly summarized and future research directions discussed. Troubles talk remains an enduring presence in our everyday interactions and provides a unique empirical vehicle for the exploration of social life. By focusing on its use-in-interaction, we are pointed towards enumerable substantive areas of sociological investigation.

CHAPTER 2
COMMUNITY AND TROUBLES: THE TRADITIONAL LITERATURE

This chapter reviews in detail traditional literature surrounding the dissertation's two primary concepts--community and troubles. Beginning with community, it traces how the concept has been formulated in sociological thought, focusing especially on its conceptualization in studies of older people. Troubles are discussed next in the context of the social problems literature, which leads to the "negative" view that troubles are precursors to social problems. As noted earlier, this is viewed as destabilizing of community life. The review establishes grounds for contrast with the alternative view presented in the dissertation, namely, that troubles--through troubles talk--can construct community.

Community

The question of what makes up a community is intriguing. Haim Hazan (1990) notes that community, "is employed to describe almost any localized group of individuals who share an identifiable culturally pervasive overarching symbol" (Schneider 1979:6). Herve Varenne (1986) suggests that the term has great symbolic value in American ideology and is used to describe many phenomena--the academic community, the gay community, the neighborhood community. It has become a metaphor through which we, in general cultural terms, give a sense of permanence to life and also a focus of the sociological study of groups that share a common social world.

Community has long been a subject of debate among philosophers and social theorists. Pragmatists John Dewey (1930, [1916] 1966) and George Herbert Mead ([1934] 1967) struggled to form a sense of community in America and questioned the manner in which this might best be accomplished. Dewey ([1916] 1966) writes that community is a relevant structure that is socially and practically accomplished in a political space:

> Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity . . . Individuals do not even compose a social group because they all work for a common end . . .If, however, they were all cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulated their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community. (Pp. 4-5; as cited in Varenne 1986:224)

In contemporary debates over exactly what community is and how it is achieved, Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987) and Anthony Giddens (1984, 1991) continue the line of argument put forth by the pragmatists. They argue for a "public sphere" produced by structural enhancements leading to greater opportunity for communicative action among individuals. Social movements surrounding gender (Krieger 1983) and sexuality (Beemyn 1997) hinge on the commonality of their members. The logical structure of community touches post-Marxism in the works of Chantal Mouffe (1995) and Ernesto Laclau (1995), and the question has reached into postmodern politics (Edge 1994) and cyberspace (Calhoun 1998; Holmes 1997).

In order to establish a foundation and theoretical baseline, it is useful to chronicle the different ways that community has been theorized in the social scientific community, in environmental design, and gerontological discussion. In the following review, I first discuss classical approaches to community in sociology, the unique contributions of

Robert Park and the Chicago School, and the intellectual offsprings of their efforts.
Following that, there is an extended discussion of gerontological literature on the subject,
most notably efforts into the impact and influence of environmental design and the
theorizing of community as based in social interaction.

Classical Beginnings

Grounded in the Industrial Revolution, social thinkers oriented to the wider
ideological community, the term "community" referring to a focus of social change as the
Industrial Revolution emerged. Community was a broad rubric for what was being
eclipsed by social change.

> For Marx ([1867] 1967), capitalism transformed the traditional relations of people
> and place into market relations, ultimately substituting a cash nexus for the
> traditional social bonds that tied peasant to lord and lord to land. For Durkheim
> ([1893] 1961) and Weber (1946, 1958), the increasing division of labor and the
> emergence of modern bureaucracy diminished all forms of primordial ties to land,
> locality, and family, substituting more formal, contractual, and temporally limited
> social bonds guaranteed by the nation-state. (Hummon 1990:24)

Of the classical theorists, it was Durkheim who most explicitly concerned himself
with the phenomenon of community. In The Division of Labor and Society ([1893]
1961), Durkheim first addresses the rapidly developing problem of urban growth and
expansion. In his theoretical orientation to community as a social form, Durkheim places
no moral value on rural or urban life, but rather on a community-society dichotomy.
Durkheim's concerns with this dichotomy lie in his orientation to the growth of the
industrial city and the resulting decrease in agricultural labor. With this shift came changes
in group solidarity, a concept Durkheim holds vital. He states:

The transition from small, provincial, homogeneous settlements to the contemporary large urban centers was accompanied by a shift in the characteristic social bond by which human cooperation and predictability is possible. He described this shift as one from <u>mechanical solidarity</u> to <u>organic solidarity</u>. (Gusfield 1978:6; emphasis in original)

Durkheim's concern with mechanical solidarity grows from a focus on group similarity. This, he argues, is best exemplified by the small, rural, agrarian community of pre-industrial Europe, suggesting this particular configuration of people best characterized community.

In the organic form cities are places that exemplify the development and integration of difference and divergence in belief, custom, and function. In the highly specialized social arrangements peculiar to the organic form, Durkheim saw new forms of organization that began the departure from the mechanical type.

In the first, what we call society is more or less organized totality of beliefs and sentiments; common to all members of the group; this is the collective type. On the other hand, the society in which we are solidarity in the second instance is a system of special functions which definite relations unite. (Durkheim [1893] 1961:129; as cited in Gusfield 1978:9)

In taking this approach, Durkheim provides a "two-sided 'answer'" to the difficulties of a changing world. First, to those gazing backwards towards a utopian past, he analytically organizes this shift in social life they are explicitly concerned with, but also suggests that this new form of solidarity is functional and "quite capable of organization and viability" (Gusfield 1978:9). However, for those who saw in city life and the new economic credo an invitation to anarchy, he argues this new form of solidarity has its own moral and normative order and continues to function as a viable form of social organization capable of creating its own functions of cohesion.

Durkheim's arguments on behalf of community and society continue to play a large role in the study of social life in the American continent. Perhaps best exemplifying this was the work of anthropologist Robert Redfield (1941, 1947) in his studies of communities and societies in the Yucatan. Redfield finds that there was an increase in what he terms "cultural disorganization," thereby leading to increased individual rights and ownership as one moved from rural areas to towns in the Yucatan. However, like Durkheim, Redfield does not see this as necessarily negative in consequence, but rather the creation of a new social system with an increased division of labor and higher degree of specialization.

Max Weber expands on Karl Marx's views of social change and specifies a sense of community tied to social stratification. Elaborating Marx's conception of a singular social division based on class structure, Weber argues for diverse spheres of social stratification that extend beyond Marx's initial conceptualizations. In opposition to Marx, he suggests that there is a multi-faceted basis for social structure, not solely an economic one. Dismissing what he considers to be the singular economic arguments of Marx, Weber proposes that "status groups" are not simply dictated by economic means, but by such factors as honor and prestige as well. In so doing, Weber, following Durkheim, proposes that groups establish moral and normative orders that are not singularly based on economic ties. Rather, that status groups form communities that are based on "common styles of life." Weber draws even closer to Durkheim as he discusses the community-society dichotomy:

Communal action refers to that action which is oriented to the feeling of actors that they belong together. Societal action, on the other hand, is oriented to a rationally motivated adjustment of interests. (Weber [1925] 1964:183; as cited in Gusfield 1978:59)

During this same period, Tönnies (1887), through his introduction of the analytic vocabulary of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft, points us towards what Craig Calhoun considers to be both an "assumed nature of community" (1980:108) and individual choices in community association. Tönnies assumes that "social relationships may rest on two bases: in understanding, unity and sentiment (i.e. natural will) or on the desire to reach some specific end (i.e., rational will)" (Poplin 1979:127). Gemeinschaft forms of social relationships are predicated upon, as McKinney (1966) notes, helpfulness, mutual aid and assistance, and a sense of common moral obligation to the group.

In contrast to this, gesellschaft relationships are based on a distinct individualism and the pursuit of personal goals, not communal ones. It is a more rational form of relationship that is predicated upon individual rights and goals held in common by its members. It is a communal relationship built on rational law that exists separately from the faith and tradition that dominate the gemeinschaft form.

The Ecological and Environmental Community

The concept of the geographically bounded community can be traced to Robert Park and his followers in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. Park, and what came to be known as the Chicago School, saw community as grounded within specific bounded geographical regions, or "territorial enclaves." At its base level, classical human ecology argues that a human society embodies two organizational levels, the biotic

and the social. The biotic level is not exclusively human but also applies to animals, plants, or any form of living creature that shares a specific bounded geographical space. Perhaps Park's most important suggestion is that by sharing a mutual space, life forms become interdependent. They are forced to be "communal" in their relationship. This, however, becomes uniquely human when social relations that must be enacted and sustained are taken into account. This move to the social relations of humans creates the foundational dichotomy between the biotic and social that human ecology depends upon.

At the communal level of the biotic, relationships between beings are not anchored by interpersonal dependancy, but rather by the simple congregation of individuals in a bounded geographical area. As Poplin (1979) observes, the relationships are determined and the inhabitants are dependent on each other in a non-cognitive way. However, on the social level, relationships are built upon a cognitive knowledge of interdependency that is fostered by communication between residents of a bounded space. There is a knowledge and respect of traditions and rules of behavior that further emphasize community among the residents, thereby fostering a sense of being in the same social space.

This approach is empirically applied in relation to Park's concern with and assessment of social problems in urban Chicago. Especially cognizant of the growing flight from the city that was occurring, one can see in the following excerpt Park's concern with the breaking down of the close ties that similar geographical space fosters and the problems that emerge when this disappears:

> In a great city, where the population is unstable, where parents and children are employed out of the house and often in distant parts of the city, where thousands of people live side by side for years without as much as a bowing acquaintance,

these intimate relationships of the primary group are weakened and the moral order which rested upon them is gradually dissolved. (Park 1952:33; as cited in Tilly 1974:210)

Empirically, Park's theoretical approach, as its deals with the aggregation of social characteristics by geographical locale in Chicago, is perhaps best exemplified in Zorbaugh's (1929) work, The Gold Coast and the Slum. In the book, Zorbaugh relates aggregate social characteristics and social organizational ones and their function as social descriptors of geographical proximity. The latter perhaps best exemplified by the sharing of a common life style by residents of a neighborhood. In a wonderfully crafted example of this argument, Zorbaugh (1929) notes that,

in Chicago all that is aloof and exclusive, all that bears the mark of l'haute societe, is crowded along the strip of "drive" between the Drake Hotel and Lincoln park, or along the quiet, aristocratic streets immediately behind it. Here is the greatest concentration of wealth in Chicago, Here lives a large number of those who have achieved distinction in industry, science and the arts. Here are Chicago's most fashionable hotels and clubs. Here live two thousand of the six thousand persons whose names are in the social register of Chicago and its suburbs, and these two thousand include in their number those who are recognized as leaders of "society" . . .The exigencies of the social game demand that "society" live in certain neighborhoods, attend certain finishing schools or universities, belong to certain clubs, patronize certain of the arts, serve on the boards of trustees of certain social and civic organizations, hold certain political prejudices, and, above all, conform to a common ritual. (Pp. 46-7, 62-3; as cited in Effrat 1974:7-8)

This orientation to the geographically bounded community has seen a continued growth into contemporary social scientific theories of community through the works of respected sociologists Hunter (1974), Strauss (1961), Lofland and Lofland (1987), and Suttles (1972). Perhaps the most significant of these was Suttles' (1972) book, The Social Construction of Communities.

Suttles finds himself interested in the shared symbols of social life that serve primary functions in the construction of community. Drawing from Warren (1963), Suttles refers to those who share commonly recognized symbols as "territorial groups." Extending the arguments of Park and Burgess, he alludes to "defended neighborhoods" as central to the construction and maintenance of a viable, active, and homogenous community. The defended neighborhood operates at the levels of the actual physical structure of the city, as human ecologists have discussed at length, and the "cognitive maps" of individuals that reside in a specific geographical area. The difference from the actual physical structure of a city and its related cognitive images is best displayed when individuals refer to neighborhood boundaries that are not physically there. Instead, they are established by what residents think, "the structure a city ought to have" (1972:22).

According to Suttles, the physical and cognitive natures of community levels are both intertwined and dependent. Cognitively, individuals might utilize specific physical markers in establishing bounded areas. An example of this is railroad tracks and their symbolization of a shift in class and social standing. However, unlike human ecology, physical structures are not a necessary part of cognitive mapping. The central question in Suttles' work is what is the impact of cognitive mapping on social movement and social space? Suttles answers the question in this way:

> The principle point of view expressed here is that these cognitive maps are part of the social control apparatus of urban areas and are of special importance in regulating spatial movement to avoid conflict between antagonistic groups. In this respect, such cognitive maps provide a set of social categories for differentiating between those people with whom one can or cannot safely associate and for defining the concrete groupings within which certain levels of social contact and social cohesion obtain. (1972:22)

By ordering social life, space, and movement through cognition, Suttles' city is a qualitative one not controlled or specifically delineated by physical structures independent of the person. The individual, according to Suttles, is capable of actively constructing a safe, bounded social world not exclusively particular to a specific physical arena.

Aging and community

Where does this take us in terms of aging and community? While Suttles' constructionist arguments have been appreciated on one level, the primary importance of the physical environment has been given the most credence. Not surprisingly, architects, urban planners, and urban designers have taken the lead in a "physical community" approach. Focus is on "the community layout and the pattern of daily life it fosters" (Langdon 1994:x). This extends down to street networks and the impact they have on the development of community in a distinct locale.

With large numbers of elderly living in age-segregated subsidized housing such as Shady Grove (Golant 1992; Golant and LaGreca 1995; Pynoos and Redfoot 1995), much of which was not constructed with community enhancement in mind, concerns with the development of community by physical design take on a very important role. Oldenburg (1991), in much the same manner as Hiss (1990), guides us through specific social spaces that we utilize every day that serve to construct community. He points to the importance of stores, bars, and beauty parlors and the practical achievements of each in terms of community construction. Calthorpe (1993) locates community in much the same manner that human ecologists do, but argues for specific physical design directives that will produce community in the particular culture of the United States. As Kay (1991) notes,

we have to design a sense of foundation in a place in order for a community to function. We have to build a "there there."

In Western society we tend to view aging negatively. As you age, life satisfaction decreases and dependency is the norm. In explaining this, Rosow (1976) notes:

> The loss of role excludes the aged from significant participation and devalues them. It deprives them of vital functions that underlie their sense of worth, their self-conceptions and self-esteem . . . because society does not specify as aged role, the lives of the elderly are socially unstructured . . . they have no significant norms for restructuring their lives. (Pp. 466-467; as cited in Jerrome 1992:3)

Due to this sense that the aged are socially isolated, research has emphasized the means through which an active social life develops and social structure is constructed among the elderly (Aldridge 1959; Jerrome 1992; Matthews 1979).

The most notable statement of this problem is presented in Irving Rosow's (1967) The Social Integration of the Aged. Concerned with the emphasis on the preoccupation of gerontologists with the impact of environmental design on social interaction and integration (Rosow 1961), Rosow proposes that the integration of the elderly can be accomplished if their roles do not change drastically as they age. As Rosow (1967:9) points out, "the crucial factor is not the absolute state of their associations so much as the sheer disruption of their previous life style, activities, and relationships." Disassociation is difficult to overcome due to patterns in contemporary social life that serve to alienate the elderly from the primary population. This fissure weakens the social ties of role and membership, primarily accomplished through family (Shanas and Streib 1965) and group association.

Though family is certainly important, those elderly who live in homogenous settings have a much higher level of interaction with their neighbors than those who live with an extended family. Rosow explains that, "in general then, because of local dependency, informal social life in the working class concentrates in the neighborhood" (1967:29). It is assumed that homogeneity of a neighborhood, such as age-segregated housing, is vital to the social integration of its members. The view is that residents share a common frame of reference and based on their proximity are very likely to actively associate and interact with each other (Caplow and Forman 1950). Proximity and social similarity lead to community.

Here, the expectation is that local settings that geographically concentrate attention on the elderly will more readily integrate the aged than residences in which there are relatively few seniors. A wide variety of anthropological and sociological studies on age-homogenous housing residences have made similar arguments (Gubrium 1975, 1993; Jerrome 1992; Ross 1977; Shield 1988). For example, Ross focuses on the social life of a retirement home in France she names "Les Floralies." She asks two central questions: When and how is age a basis for community and through what process do communities of the elderly emerge?

In answering these questions she finds that social life in the retirement home displays a higher degree of social organization than that outside its walls. Community in Les Floralies is formed through organized groups and activities of the residence, which produce a wide group of social contacts and a sense of "we-ness." An example of this would be common mealtimes for the residents. These facilitate face-to-face interaction

among the nursing home residents and assist in integrating new residents. With an increase in interaction among the residents of Les Floralies, a community is created.

Along with the organized and bonding activities of the residence, what else works to form community? Social status is of great importance in establishing communal borders. A shared social status leads to a common life-world among facility members. In sharing the common trait of age the residents find themselves in situations that are peculiar to them as a group.

Like all large individual groupings, social life in Les Floralies is not without its problems. These problems, however, work in positive ways. Community there is also shaped by a strange combination of conflict and community. As Simmel (1964) noted, one of the primary impacts of involvement in a social conflict is the formation of a community (Coleman 1957). The community is constructed along the social parameters of various resident "factions" in the home based on outside political affiliation. Given the large number of active political parties both inside the facility and France as a whole, conflicts consistently arise among the various groups, especially around election times. The political arguments and ideological debates among residents tightens each respective political circle, drawing its members together in a common front.

Perhaps the best known of the studies of senior community life is The Unexpected Community (Hochschild 1973). Based on fieldwork in senior public housing in the San Francisco area, Hochschild discovers a community that by all outside standards and perception should not exist. From her work as assistant recreation director of the building she terms "Merrill Court," Hochschild has access to almost all aspects of residents' lives in

the building. This provides her with a unique opportunity to investigate the social life of

the premises.

In The Unexpected Community, Hochschild focuses on what she considers to be

the primary problem of old age, which she views as isolation. Commenting on this, she

explains:

> I think this problem is important for two reasons. First, it has become a sad
> commonplace to associate being old with being alone. We regard isolation as a
> punishment for prisoners, but perhaps a majority of American old people are in
> some degree isolated or fear the prospect of it. To the extent that isolation breeds
> loneliness and the extent that loneliness is painful, isolation is a serious problem on
> humanitarian grounds. Old age communities such as the one described here offer
> an alternative to isolation. Being alone, a person can come to see his problems as
> individual rather than collective in nature. "Old age consciousness" is an
> alternative, suggesting as it does collective solutions. (1973:18)

In working to solve this problem, Hochschild seeks to determine how the elderly

residents of Merrill Court construct a sense of community, which keeps isolation at bay.

She uncovers a social order that is richly constructed by age, by floor location, sibling

bonds, age stratification, and which is flexible in its social stratification. Similar to Les

Florailes, Merrill Court offers the residents a highly structured set of social activities, from

bowling and bible study groups, to visits to local nursing homes.

However, while the community forms a structured social setting and offers diverse

organized activities, there is a certain flexibility developed from the residents' personal

experiences. Hochschild (1973:15) notes that the residents are active in, "bringing their

histories to a town itself undergoing rapid social change." In so doing, Hochschild does

not compress the emerging community strictly within the social confines of the culture of

the apartment building, but appreciates outside social factors that impact the social

structure in Merrill Court.

Environmental design and aged-segregated facilities

According to Gubrium and Lynott (1983), "the life satisfaction of old people has

been a perennial concern of researchers in the field of aging" (p. 30). Many researchers

have ventured into its perceived causes, correlations, and consequences (Cavan et al.

1949). Seen as a measurement of morale, adjustment, well-being, happiness, and

successful aging, it has gained an important place in gerontological research.

In recent years, the impact of housing satisfaction on overall ratings of well-being

and life satisfaction by elderly residents of age-segregated residences has been discussed in

great detail by architects, landscape architects, and planners. There is an interrelation,

many argue, between the physical, built environment, and the behavior of the elderly.

Carp (1976a) notes:

> Positive physical qualities of the housing environment can influence an elderly
> person's activity level, social contact, well-being, and general lifestyle. Moreover,
> the physical attractiveness of housing has been related to tenant satisfaction (Carp
> 1976b), and better physical facilities have been associated with improved resident
> functioning. (Moos et al. 1987:131)

The importance of neighborhood or building design to the life satisfaction of the

elderly becomes increasingly important, designers argue, when one considers the ease in

which the physical environment, contrary to an existing social environment, can be

positively altered, "the relationship of housing satisfaction to the [built] environment is

very important because, as Marans and Wellman (1979) point out, it is much easier to

manipulate design . . . variable than other personal aspects that define the quality of life" (Butterfield and Weidemann 1987:135).

Fighting the perceived disengagement of residents from the "outside world" and each other that many link with age-homogenous housing, the correct design, researchers argue, is vital in increasing vital social interaction and maintaining needed private spaces as well. Indeed, one of the primary purposes behind the development of age-segregated facilities for the elderly was to increase opportunities for social interaction and friendships with ones peers. A properly designed housing area, placed in the correct location, can, "promote friendship formation and sociability" (Regnier and Pynoos 1987:8). Taken together, the "tripod analogy" of environmental design, residential location, and management of age-homogenous facilities, has the capability of producing a friendly and satisfying social environment for the elderly (Regnier and Pynoos 1987).

Social Constructionism, Troubles, and Social Problems Work

Though appearing in articles over a brief period of time in the mid-1970s in the journal Social Problems (Kitsuse and Spector 1973, 1975; Spector and Kitsuse 1974), it was in Constructing Social Problems (Spector and Kitsuse [1977] 1987) that a social constructionist perspective was most clearly organized and articulated. Arguing against a structural-functionalist approach to the study of deviance (Merton 1976), this new focus on the subjective rather than objective nature of social problems presented a radical shift in the way in which social problems were approached theoretically.

In the following section, I first consider social constructionism as a sociological perspective to social problems. Second, the impact of the development and integration of

Emerson and Messinger's (1977) work on the micro-politics of troubles is discussed.
Finally, the emergence of a "social problems work" perspective is discussed in terms of its
contribution to social constructionism and the study of social problems (Holstein and
Miller 1993; Miller and Holstein 1989, 1997).

The Emergence of Constructionism

In opposition to Merton's structural-functionalist perspectives on social problems,
social constructionism suggests that social problems do not exist prior to an actual
subjective knowing of them. A structural-functionalist approach, on the other hand,
assumes social problems as real and observable conditions, independent of our own
knowing.

Specifically, how does constructionism differ from the functionalist position on
deviance and social problems? Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 1987) argue that social
problems do not exist a priori, but must be defined as such through a process they term
"claims-making." Analytic attention is focused on the actual processes though which a
condition comes to be recognized as a social problem. The rhetorical construction of a
social problem can be analyzed by varied means, they argue, and in varied empirical
settings. Spector and Kitsuse note:

> Public rhetoric and the politics of claims-making are analyzed in the myriad
> circumstances in which social problems construction takes place, including
> 'demanding services, filling out forms, lodging complaints, filing lawsuits, calling
> press conferences, writing letters of protest, passing resolutions, publishing
> exposes, placing ads in newspapers, supporting or opposing governmental practice
> or policy, setting up picket lines or boycotts. ([1977] 1987:79; as cited in Holstein
> and Miller 1993:6)

A Sociology of Troubles and Social Problems Work

During the same year that Spector and Kitsuse organized their theory of social constructionism into a concise volume, Emerson and Messinger (1977) published their article, "The Micro-Politics of Trouble." While constructionist in approach, Emerson and Messinger specifically focus their analytic attention on the manner in which a "trouble" is constituted as such on a micro level. Concerned with the methods through which personal troubles are negotiated, a "sociology of troubles" concentrates on the socio-historical movements of a initial trouble into a recognizable social problem.

Let's look closer at the evolutionary climb that a trouble takes to reach a social problem stage. This climb follows, as noted in the previous paragraph, a socio-historical ascent from an initial formulation as an amorphous and undefined trouble to a common social problem. For example, you may suffer from a severe headache and turn to common medications, such as aspirin, to treat it. However, the aspirin does not diminish the headache and you turn to those closest to you, such as family and friends, for advice. They suggest that you may be suffering from some acute condition that causes your headaches and suggest various treatments. After trying the treatments suggested, the headache still persists. At this point, somewhat exasperated, you decide to visit a doctor, or an "official agent."

The doctor functions as the final arbiter, in your case, of what your initial trouble actually is. It might possibly be an allergic reaction to a new herb you had recently been taking for mental alertness or possibly a severe head cold. It is the interactional formation of the trouble between the formal mechanisms of the official agent, or the doctor in this

case, and less formal means, such as friends and family, that accomplish the meaning of the trouble. This progression and specification of the problem plays itself out in specific social settings where friends, family, doctors, and perhaps counselors work to diagnose your headache. It is in this setting that a "sociology of troubles" finds the grist of social life that it looks for.

> [A]ny social setting generates a number of evanescent, ambiguous difficulties that may ultimately be--but are not immediately--identified as "deviant." In many instances what is first recognized is a vague sense of "something wrong"--some "problem" or "trouble." (Emerson and Messinger 1977:121)

How might we extrapolate beyond the personalized example of the headache used above? Listen as this more analytically focused example unfolds. Beginning with a first notice that something is wrong, or difficult, or unpleasant, the individual seeks to define or give some sort of meaning to the difficulty: you notice that your feet hurt often; you seem to be losing weight, or you and your partner just don't seem to have the "same old spark" that you once did. Now, while it is certainly possible that the individual who is afflicted with these difficulties might decide they are not of importance and dismiss them, he or she might also consider seeking a remedy or some other method of alleviating the particular difficulty. Possibly, the remedy is searched for and is found. However, after much time and effort, the remedy first identified does not work. Accordingly, a different remedy is sought. Again, friends are asked and another is suggested. The person tries this one as well, but again to no avail.

What is occurring here? In effect, what we have is cyclical pattern in which the remedies are holding "until further notice" (Garfinkel 1967). The remedy sought and

applied to the trouble is central to the trouble defining process. This spiraling, definitional process is the journey through which the trouble finally emerges. Emerson and Messinger (1977) echo this when they write, "conceptually, the definition of a trouble can be seen as the emergent product, as well as the initial precipitant, of remedial actions" (p. 123).

Returning to the initiation of a trouble, Emerson and Messinger suggest that "intrinsic remedies" are first employed to correct the problem. The remedies are offered as micro-management strategies for coping with the initial, personal trouble. The interpersonal difficulty remains on the level of the primary interactants only if the remedy is successful in alleviating the problem. If this is satisfactory, outside sources are not invoked in order to remedy the trouble. If outside or official help is solicited however the third-party now involved begins the professional cycle through which troubles may eventually evolve into social problems.

By tracing the movement from what is initially labeled as a pre-deviant vagueness of something wrong to the final definition by an official agent of the trouble as a widespread problem, Emerson and Messinger propose a sociology of troubles that focuses on the exact, cyclical manner in which a trouble is enumerated into a social problem. A sociology of troubles extends, in concrete detail, the proposals of Spector and Kitsuse concerning the construction of social problems and the methods through which this is accomplished.

Empirically, a sociology of troubles and troubles talk has been explored in a number of empirical settings. These include college psychiatric clinics (Schwartz 1976; Schwartz and Kahne 1977; Kahne and Schwartz 1978), psychiatric board and care

facilities (Emerson, Rochford, and Shaw 1983), and HIV and family therapy counseling (Miller and Silverman 1995).

First, let's look at the work of Schwartz and Kane (1977) and their investigation into the workings of a college counseling center. Empirically, the authors consider the methods that college students and psychiatrists at the center employ in the negotiation of students' troubles. By studying the interactions of counselor and student, they discover what they term "three mutually subjective social states" (1977:194), that construct student's troublesome experiences.

In the first state, students labels their troubles as "momentary difficulties," "ordinary trouble," or "serious trouble." Second, in dealing with the diagnoses by their patients, the psychiatrists have their own particular professional orientations. This creates what Schwartz and Kane (1977) refer to as a "matrix of possibilities" of what the trouble is. Third, the different consequences for each trouble is defined through counselor-patient interaction.

For instance, if a trouble was diagnosed as ordinary or normal, then students often wondered what exactly the counselor could help them with. After all, if the problem was a simple one, then why would professional help be needed? However, if the trouble was constructed as a more serious or complex problem, the student/patient was treated by professional counselors, as one might presuppose. However, often times the counseling or other forms of psychiatric help was performed in sites outside the clinic. Why was this done? The college counseling center often found itself overwhelmed due to caseload and staffing limitations. By sending the student to a professional counselor outside the

jurisdiction of the college, the initial, everyday trouble of the student was further elaborated.

In terms of professional-student interaction, patient and practitioner often disagree as to what a problem might actually be, or its level of seriousness. After all, to a student, or anyone, troubles arise everyday. Why might a particular trouble be any more significant than another? According to Schwartz and Kane (1977), the most commonly used manner of dealing with the conflict is through what they term an "illusion of agreement." Here, a professional counselor might denote a certain trouble that might be considered serious and worthy of professional attention. Instead, the counselor does not bring the trouble up in the session.

The reason for this is quite practical. While the trouble might be seen as serious, the interactional dynamics of the session might also dictate that the trouble be treated as a simple or common trouble. The session could well be uncomfortable and the student uncooperative. While the trouble might be well worthy of professional attention in other settings, the counselor also has practical concerns in dealing with the dynamics of the interview. These contingencies dictate that the counselor treat the trouble, in agreement with the student, as unproblematic and easily resolved.

Emerson, Rochford, and Shaw (1983), also study a psychiatric center. However, they investigate both a psychiatric board and care facility. At the time of their research, these type of facilities were rapidly increasing in number due to the de-institutionalization of mental illness by the state. Concentrating on the micro-political negotiation of troubles

in the center, the authors describe and analyze it in accord with two specific negotiating practices.

The first, emphasizing a community built on support and sponsorship, focuses on the ways in which staff respond to the constant barrage of resident troubles. The decision by staff to actually report a specific trouble was often based on the type of social relationship a patient had developed with specific staff members. In essence, these relationships served as a form of capital that the staff could draw on to support a patient in troublesome situations. Of course, the level of support increased if a resident had developed a high degree of support from a particular staff member. Because of this, the staff member might be willing to actually sponsor the patient and were there to, "provide daily contact during immediate crises and frequent support and counseling for dealing with long-term emotional problems and ultimate life goals" (1983:355). In short, the staff member served as a protective shield when troublesome situations arose.

Miller and Silverman (1993) point us in a different direction when investigating troubles in institutions. Their work incorporates a Foucauldian perspective on discourse and the methodological apparatus of conversation analysis into an analysis of troubles talk. The inclusion of conversation analysis into the investigation of troubles is important since this particular perspective initially embraced and studied the specific, mundane practice of troubles talk. Other perspectives, such as the micro-political stance on troubles, focused attention on the progression of troubles into larger social problems.

An outgrowth of ethnomethodological research (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984), conversation analysis (Sacks 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) originated from

a need to systematically problematize and analyze conversation in order to unearth its foundational micro-structures, "the minutiae of naturally occurring interactions" (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Founded by Harvey Sacks, a student of Erving Goffman's at the University of California at Berkeley, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, it has developed as perhaps the most influential of all forms of ethnomethodologically informed research (Maynard and Clayman 1991).

Conversation analysis relies on a base assumption that locally managed structured situations of talk are constitutive in their own right. Namely, interaction is structurally organized and can be observed in everyday conversation. As Gubrium and Holstein (1997:56; emphasis in original) note, "all aspects of interaction can be found to exhibit organized patterns of stable, identifiable, structural features." Conversation is seen as organized and tightly situated and requires competent speakers to perform the monstrous task of talking together in a coherent, competent manner.

> Turns at talk do not simply happen to occur one after the other but rather "belong together" as a socio-organizational unit and where there is methodic relationship between the various turns or parts . . . a set of mutual obligations established by the structural relations between these sequence parts, with each action projecting some next. (Whalen 1992:306; as cited in Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

Using a conversation analytic approach, Gail Jefferson (1984, 1988; Jefferson and Lee 1981, 1992) argues that in ordinary conversation, troubles talk is ordered through its disorder. Jefferson analyzes how interactants move from normal, "business as usual" discussions to troubles talk and back again while still attending to the local contingencies of particular situations (Miller and Silverman 1995). She extends her arguments in later works through an analysis of the manner in which troubles talk in everyday, ordinary

conversation can be changed through the other conversant's perspective on the interaction itself. In Jefferson and Lee's (1992) later work on troubles talk, attention is given to the organization of trouble talk in institutional settings.

The perspective of Jefferson and Lee's on institutional troubles talk allows Miller and Silverman to develop a model revolving around institutional discourses and the manner in which individual troubles are articulated into social problems through specific ordering of communication in the counseling encounter. By approaching the talk of counseling in the manner, the methods in which discourses are brought into play by professionals in a counseling session can then become topics of analysis in their own right.

Using a creative blend of conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, and Foucauldian discourse analysis, Miller and Silverman uniquely illuminate the way that troubles talk functions in an institutional setting, where more "is on the line," than in its operation in everyday encounters outside of an institution. In institutional talk there are particular methods through which troubles must be communicated. According to the authors, this "discursive editing" proves to be a powerful force in shaping the relations between interactants.

The varied approaches to troubles and troubles talk discussed here point social problems analysis towards the methods in which social organizations, institutions, and their settings serve to construct social problems. This approach has led to a burst of studies on various institutional settings and their role in social problems production. As a theoretical tool, the analysis of the production of social problems through organizations

and people-processing institutions has been most aptly stated and summarized in the

theories of "social problems work."

Advocating the use of a social problems work perspective and the deficiencies of

social constructionism, Holstein and Miller suggest that social constructionism tends,

> to gloss over the interactional production of concrete instances of social problems,
> even as they focus on forms of vernacular usage as the constitutive source of social
> problems as social forms. A sociology of social problems work neither contradicts
> nor denies this project. Rather it both expends and transforms the constructionist
> project to address how social problems categories, once publicly established, are
> attached to experience in order to enact identifiable objects of social problems
> discourse. (1993:132)

As a theoretical approach, social problems work focuses its analysis on what

Durkheim ([1912] 1961) termed "collective representations," or categories that are

oriented to as a given reality. In turn, these categorizations provides a rational order to

the social world. However, according to social problems work, Durkheim lost sight of the

means through which these collective representations are constituted in everyday

practices. By bridging "Durkheimian structural concerns" with ethnomethodology,

phenomenology, and social constructionist approaches, social problems, as "schemes of

interpretation" (Schutz 1970), can be analyzed on the level of their constitutive

production. Echoing this, Holstein and Miller (1993) argue that social problems work

involves actual procedures and techniques for applying culturally shaped categories to

specific circumstances. Practical interpretations and understandings are formed by the

interpretive structures and resources that are locally available and acceptable to the

interactants.

CHAPTER 3
SETTING AND RESEARCH METHODS

Fieldwork, as Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) note, "must certainly rank with the more disagreeable activities that humanity has fashioned for itself. It is usually inconvenient, to say the least, physically uncomfortable, frequently embarrassing, and, to a degree, always tense" (p. 1). There may not be a more personally troublesome research method in the social sciences. The researcher must deal with experiences, "bound together with satisfactions, embarrassments, challenges, pains, triumphs, ambiguities, and agonies . . . in the field research adventure" (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:7). He or she must become acquainted with a "foreign" way of life and deal with the lack of a clear procedural agenda.

But there is no substitute for direct engagement with others if one is to investigate how everyday lives are organized. To see how people perceive, directly accomplish, and construct the world they live in, field research is required. It is an "activity that repositions the social scientist in such a way as to allow for questioning that would be otherwise unavailable" (Grills 1998:11).

The discussion of fieldwork methods here is organized roughly in the terms that Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) address it. The authors conceive of fieldwork as a process of, in their words, "(a) entering the field setting; (b) learning how to play one's role while

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there, whether it be that of researcher or someone else; (c) maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge; and (d) leaving the setting" (p. 7).

Though the actual practice of fieldwork is not as linear as the authors represent it, an issue that I return to, it does provide an organization that underscores the active, social "dimensions" of the experience. My discussion of these as they apply to Shady Grove is not meant to be presented as a recipe for this kind of activity, but rather to show how practically complex the process is through time. Beginning with a discussion of the setting itself, I follow Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) by addressing, in order, three stages of field research--gaining entry and maintaining relations, "learning the ropes," and "leaving the field." I begin with discussing the setting of Shady Grove within a public housing complex.

The Setting

While the research setting does delineate a geographical site that the fieldworker must physically go to, it does not exist independently of the world in which it exists. Shady Grove, and its distinctive social and cultural contours, does not exist as a physical locale without the laws and mandates that both created it and currently maintain it. In this section, I first discuss the characteristics of Shady Grove in terms of both its physical layout and it residents. Following this discussion, I trace the unique history of public housing in the United States and conclude with a discussion of the present relationship between the elderly and subsidized housing.

Physical and Demographic Characteristics of Shady Grove

Built in 1985, Shady Grove is relatively invisible to the average passerby. Easily ignored from the street, it is located on a side road located off the main thoroughfare. No sign demarcates the area as public housing. In fact, the name Shady Grove has been informally assigned to the neighborhood from the name of an apartment complex adjacent to the public housing area. The complex is not named in any federal documentation pertaining to its construction or funding.

The neighborhood is constructed around two cul-de-sacs and consists of 34 apartments. Of the units, 32 are single-bedroom, with the remaining apartments two-bedroom. All of the units in Shady Grove are in "quads," red brick buildings that house four units each.

As noted above, the neighborhood is physically constructed around two primary cul-de-sacs. The smaller cul-de-sac is surrounded by two quads. The larger cul-de-sac is faced with one side of the second quad, and as you enter, another quad on the other side of the street. There are two small parking lots separating these buildings from two others. Parking lots are placed on either side again and around the two quads at the rear of the neighborhood. Roughly one-third of the actual units face away from both the parking areas and the main cul-de-sacs. Indeed, they face directly into a wood fence dividing Shady Grove from the apartment complex directly behind it. Additional units are at the direct end of the building, thus placing themselves in a corner that creates a social area not conducive to interaction between neighbors. There is are no common spaces or sitting areas for the residents to mingle and talk. Though each resident does have a small front

porch, they are rarely seen outside. The units in the quads lining the main cul-de-sacs are in the rear of the buildings, secluded from the rest of the neighborhood.

Many of the residents erect lattices or grow shrubs to prevent easy viewing into the porches. A number of residents informed me that they had erected these barriers specifically for privacy. It was common to see one's neighbors as intrusive. One resident spoke most poignantly of this as she noted that she had planted a number of banana tress, "to keep these damn people from spying on me. They'll do that ya' know." For those porches still open to the naked eye, only a select few, such as Opal's, display any furniture. Lastly, I rarely observed residents working in the front of their units. There were few flowers or gardening areas in Shady Grove. In short, it was a barren and plain place.

The neighborhood is surrounded by student housing apartment complexes. The street is full of students as they ride their bikes to class, exercise, or talk with friends. A nearby bus stop is often clogged with students as they wait to go to campus. In the month before my arrival in The Grove, the side street was extended to a main transportation artery, linking it with large numbers of other student housing complexes. Shady Grove is, in fact, the only neighborhood in its general area that does not cater to the large student population of the town.

Built as an almost entirely single-bedroom complex, the neighborhood was originally constructed as a means to house the elderly and the disabled or mentally ill. The housing authority cares deeply for the resident of Shady Grove and places great emphasis on "their elderly." Following orders from Ms. Thompson, the maintenance men work

very hard to keep the living conditions in The Grove higher than other public housing areas managed by the housing authority. The placement of the elderly in a central complex serves the practical purpose of providing them with a "safe" housing area that can easily be attended to. The units in Shady Grove, unlike units in other complexes, are equipped with special showers and alarm systems. Thanks to safety features and managerial emphasis, Shady Grove has gradually become the elderly public housing neighborhood

According to common knowledge in the field of environmental design, the design of a housing complex, including elderly neighborhoods, is integral to a high level of interaction, "one of the primary purposes behind the development of age-segregated housing for the elderly has been the desire to increase opportunities for social interaction and formation of friendships" (Regnier and Pynoos 1987:6). According to research performed in this area, much of which focuses on environmental features and physical designs that encourage socializing among the seniors in residence (Howell 1980; Regnier 1985), it has been argued that, "spaces tend to promote social interaction--such as community rooms, entry area, and lounges . . ." (Regnier and Pynoos 1987:6). Friendly spaces and building design that allows common viewing of open areas and other residents are stressed as means through which socialization can occur more readily. In fact, Regnier and Pynoos (1987) argue, the design of housing areas that promote socialization should be the goal of all designers.

The environmental design of Shady Grove seems to break all agreed upon rules in the architectural design profession regarding the creation of friendly spaces that promote

high levels of interaction. In fact, Shady Grove almost looks as it were designed to curb interaction and to prevent the formation of community.

At the time of my entrance into the area, of the 34 available units, 30 were occupied, with one resident moving out, and one new resident arriving during my fieldwork. The average age of the residents was 72.8 years of age, with the youngest resident being 53 and the oldest 90. Broken down by gender, 26 of the residents were female, 8 male. Of the resident population, 23 were white, 6 were black, 3 were Hispanic, and 3 were of Asian descent. Income was almost completely from Social Security, with a minimal amount of residents employed, and a small number also receiving Social Security Insurance (SSI). Volunteering among the female residents was common in "grandmother programs" or such affiliated with local hospitals and elementary schools. As far as I know, only one resident, "Gypsy," carried an employed position. A former professional dancer on Broadway, she worked in a therapeutic dancing program at a large local hospital.

Historical Overview of Public Housing and Present Role of the Elderly

Established through various federal mandates and laws such as the National Industrial Act of 1933, the Housing Act of 1937, the Housing Act of 1949, and the Housing Act of 1965, public housing in the United States has undergone a number of changes and alterations in its goals and overall policy since its inception. Each specific Housing Act worked to construct public housing and the efforts of the federal government in this area through specific discursive formats. The Housing Act of 1937 galvanized attention on the general welfare of the states and begged their interest and support through claims that public housing efforts would alleviate unemployment, unsafe and

unsanitary urban housing environments, and remedy the shortage of "decent and safe" housing for low-income residents. In the midst of the Great Depression, these efforts by the federal government were greatly supported by states due to the extreme economic duress they were operating under.

The Housing Act of 1949 suggested that the goal of public housing was to provide "decent" housing to families. In the Act, we first see the extensive demographic counts used to figure "accurate" public housing numbers--housing research, a housing census, and the U.S. Census as a whole. As a federal program, public housing was sold as a means for the stimulation of a poor economy, not as a means for the overall improvement of social welfare, "Not until the Housing Act of 1965 is there overt and unequivocal support for public housing based on the collective responsibility to improve the quality of life of the poor and unfortunate" (Meehan 1975:15).

As noted, until 1965 public housing could only be suggested as a means for improving the economy, not for the assistance of the poor (Meehan 1975). The opposition to this was strong and vigilant.

> Public housing could be suppled for the poor only by disguising its purpose, by identifying it as a useful by-product of economic pump-priming; that practice was particularly common in the legislature. Little effort was made to win over the opposition, and in all honesty it would not have succeeded; those opposed to public housing rarely denied the presence of a seriously deprived population or asserted the capacity of private enterprise to care for them. They simply attacked public housing on emotional grounds, using as ammunition such slogans as "undemocratic," "un-American," or "creeping socialism." (Meehan 1975:16)

In addition, public housing was severely crippled in terms of achieving any particular successes given that a target population was vague, and heterogeneous

populations (i.e. the lower-income or the "poor"), were treated as homogeneous in makeup, "failing to discriminate between working poor, temporarily dependent poor, and permanently dependent poor" (Meehan 1975:16). Based on socialist arguments against public housing however, it was clearly impossible for the federal government to be allocated the needed funding to develop the capability to actually determine the demographic breakdown of the poor, thereby precluding the improvement and success of public housing.

The 1960s displayed a significant change in the discourse and rhetoric of public housing and housing for the poor as a whole, as well as a basic reorganization in terms of its management. The actual management structure was altered to place more emphasis on the local overseeing of public housing by housing authorities, in most cases run by local political jurisdictions such as counties and cities. Various alternatives to public housing were explored such as the management of complexes by private organizations, the rehabilitation of older homes and housing instead of the construction of new lower-income housing, the advent of "turnkey" housing, and perhaps most importantly, the advent of rental supplements and housing vouchers such as the federally mandated Section 8 program.

The 1970s saw a decrease in governmental efforts towards conventional public housing, instead pursuing alternative means in assisting lower-income households in finding housing below market rates. The rhetoric of public housing now shifted from simply providing adequate physical housing for the poor, "to a concern for the social welfare of the tenants: development of a sense of community, participation in common

affairs including housing management . . ." (Meehan 1975:15). Public housing was increasingly becoming a component of the overall social service program of the government oriented towards the urban poor.

Importantly, during this time of decreasing emphasis on traditional public housing, traditional, conventional public housing was being built for and aimed at the elderly poor, a trend that has continued into the 1990s through programs operated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). Golant (1992) notes that, "at the end of the 1980s, more than 1.9 million elderly households were living in low-rent housing subsidized in some manner by the federal government. This represented 9.6% of the nation's households containing persons aged 65 and older" (U.S. Congressional Budget Office 1988; U.S. Senate 1991:117).

The elderly, according to Golant (1992), have received disproportionate benefits from federal housing programs. In 1988, roughly 43% of all low-rent federally operated housing units were occupied by elderly households, although the elderly make up only 22% of all households in the United States (U.S. Congressional Budget Office 1988). This difference becomes even more striking when one realizes that elderly households make up only 28% of all lower-income rental households in the country (Golant 1992; U.S. Congressional Budget Office 1988). As of 1990, the elderly occupied 482,209 public housing units or apartments (U.S. Senate 1991).

Redfoot and Gaberlavage (1991) provide three reasons for the over representation: "(1) older residents are poorer than other renters, (2) long-time residents have 'aged-in-place,' and (3) several federal housing programs have targeted assistance to older people"

(p. 37; as cited in Golant 1992:117). The elderly are more likely than the non-elderly to pay more than 30% of their household income on housing. In addition, once the elderly become poor, they are much less likely than other households to achieve higher economic status. Lastly, the elderly in the United States have historically had higher rates of poverty than other age-groups (U.S. Senate et al. 1991). Other possible reasons for the disproportionate representation of the elderly in federally-subsidized housing programs include the "stickiness" of elderly to this form of housing, or their high rates of actually remaining in the housing once they move in, that construction of elderly public housing complexes does not raise the same level of political opposition as conventional public housing, thus making it an easier "sell," and that the elderly, as a group, are highly effective in lobbying efforts to secure funding for projects targeted directly towards their housing needs (Golant 1992; Pynoos 1984).

The primary means through which elderly public housing, such as the Shady Grove neighborhood, is provided is through the federally mandated Section 202 program, enacted under the Housing Act of 1959. Section 202 funds the construction of new low-rent apartments/units built and designed specifically for the lower-income elderly and disabled (non-elderly) population. At the end of the 1980s, roughly 3,200 complexes/neighborhoods had been funded under Section 202. In these areas, 218,00 of the units were occupied by elderly households, and 12,000 by non-elderly disabled individuals (Golant 1992).

Section 202 is considered by housing experts as the most successful of all federally funded housing programs designed specifically for the elderly (U.S. House of

Representatives 1989). Golant (1992) suggests that, "the program has had a low default rate, is considered well managed, and residents report high satisfaction with their accommodations. Vacancy rates are extremely low and waiting lists are very long" (p. 135). However, there have been several recent changes in the program that have sparked some concern. Most notably, the problems surround the administrative handling of the program and the delays that this produces. In addition, there have been complaints concerning the actual physical size of the public housing neighborhoods and the increasing propensity of Section 202 complexes to contain efficiency units, instead of the "normal" size public housing apartment (Golant 1992). Nevertheless, Section 202 Housing, like that of Shady Grove, has made a significant contribution in terms of housing provisions for the poor elderly.

Gaining Entry and Maintaining Relations

Guidebooks to field research portray the matter of gaining entry to a setting as, achieving "authorized entrance" (see Grills 1998; Lofland and Lofland 1995; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Once access is granted by a "gatekeeper," the gaining-entry part of the fieldwork process is ostensibly complete. The researcher can then turn his or her attention to actually gathering data. However, the process of "getting in" to the site is not as geographically clear-cut as this, but rather hermeneutic in form.

> Fundamentally, access involves gaining permission to conduct research in a particular social setting. Far from being a straightforward procedure, it involves negotiation and renegotiation, influences the kind of investigation that can be completed, and occurs throughout the research process. (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:25)

I first became acquainted with Shady Grove as a young intern working with the small county housing authority. Recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science, I entered into graduate study in urban and regional planning at a local university. At the end of my first semester in the program, I received a graduate fellowship from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. While paying for academic related travel and all fees and tuition, the fellowship also required work at a local organization that employed "planning" in some way. A professor was familiar with the local housing authority and contacted them about a possible internship. The executive director, Ms. Thompson, was more than pleased to receive free help, and so another graduate student who had also received the fellowship and I entered into employment with the housing authority.

As time went by I became familiar with the workings of the public housing authority and began to visit the neighborhoods. Almost all of the 318 units operated by the housing authority were in the rural areas of the county, except for a small number in the city and its urban fringe. Shady Grove is one of these complexes. I visited the area several times as a young intern, often performing surveys of residents for federal grant applications and other bureaucratic tasks.

Years later, I found myself a graduate student in sociology at the university. I was approaching my dissertation work and had received federal funds for my research in aging. While considering various dissertation options, I remembered Shady Grove. It seemed to be a perfect fit for my interests.

Somewhat hesitantly, after so many years of separation from the housing authority, I approached Ms. Thompson about the possibility of returning to The Grove. She was quite pleased with my return and my project. Ms. Thompson had always expressed a love for the elderly residents there and was eager to gain further information about them so the housing authority might provide better services. She enthusiastically accepted my proposal and told me to, "get out there and get going."

My entrance seemed to be perfectly timed. The housing authority was hosting a barbecue for the residents on the following Sunday. The cookout was scheduled to take place in Shady Grove and provided a unique opportunity to meet and talk with many of the people I was going to spend a significant amount of time with in the near future. In order to introduce myself to the residents, Ms. Thompson and I jointly prepared a memorandum for the residents. The memorandum explained who I was and what services I would provide for the residents during my time there. As it turned out, very few of the residents actually read the memorandum. As one resident told me, "I don't read nothing they send me." This seemed to be the prevailing attitude of most of the Grovers so it was no surprise that the memorandum went unread.

I attended the barbecue and met many of the residents, briefly speaking with a few. It was a beautiful day. John, the Maintenance Director, was grilling hamburgers and hotdogs on the grill and a musician was playing the guitar and singing for the residents. Many sang along when he performed well-known songs. I wandered throughout the party, introducing myself and telling the residents what I would be doing there. Though not seeming of great consequence at the time, this initial entry into The Grove helped to

establish who I was and what I was to be doing. Importantly, it provided me with legitimation since I was there at a housing authority sponsored event. As I spoke with many of residents later about their initial impressions of me, quite a few remembered who I was from the cookout. To them, this affiliated me with the housing authority.

Ms. Thompson told me that a resident of the neighborhood, Mike, would be a good person to show me around and introduce me to other residents. Soon after Ms. Thompson told me of Mike, I called her and spoke with her about my work in Shady Grove. I asked Mike for her assistance in helping me become acquainted with the other residents. At the time, she was hesitant and not really sure that it was a good idea. As she asked, "Why do you want me to take you around? I don't know half of 'em. Used to know more, but people don't talk as much now." However, Mike agreed to assist me. We set up a meeting for the following day at 10:00 am.

Mike and I met that morning and we began our "rounds," as she later called our ventures around the neighborhood. Mike is a "sprightly" 85 year-old woman. She is the only resident who has lived in the neighborhood since its establishment. On the day that she showed me around The Grove, Mike was dressed in an old, worn-out plaid coat with white polyester pants and her trademark brown stocking cap. Sticking out on all sides of her cap was bright red hair.

Red hair and all, we walked around the complex visiting residents. Almost all the residents we met seemed to know Mike well and spoke to her as a friend. Mike informed me later that they all knew her, but some "were losing it a bit," as she put it.

After our visitations around Shady Grove Mike invited me back to her unit for chocolate cake and a soft drink. I accepted and we began to return. As we crossed the parking lot, tenants Donna and Margaret called out to us. We had spoken to each early in our rounds, and Mike was friendly with both, especially Donna. The two women were standing by my car, a white RX-7, and they invited Mike and me over to talk. Donna and Margaret were discussing the problems of the American medical system and the implications it had on the elderly. Both women seemed to know the system quite well and the difficulties it caused them. Mike joined in on the conversation and the women, as a group, began to discuss the personal troubles they were having with medical benefits. While both Margaret and Mike certainly had problems, it was Donna who was having the worst time of it. The worst of these problems being her own private health insurance.

> I told them that I could give them maybe one dollar a month. I could spare that. The woman said that no, they couldn't do that. I told her, well I don't know what you are going to do 'cause I can't pay the $92. She said they could work something out, I just have to fill out a bunch of forms. I guess they were nice enough about it but they didn't have to bother me for $92. I just don't have that kind of money.

This was my first instance of noticeably hearing "troubles in action." The three ladies centered their talk around their common troubles with health care. I was to hear a similar refrain over and over during my time in Shady Grove.

While this was my initial entry into Shady Grove, it only tells part of the story. Burgess might note that what I have done here are, "only the strategies and tactics for getting into a research location . . . access as a one-off activity that prefaces the real work

. . . [and] access [as] isolated from the researcher's relationship from the politics of social investigation" (1991:43).

He suggests that access to a site is dependent on the forms of relationships with people. This is especially true in regards to "gatekeepers" and "friendships." It was readily apparent during my work in Shady Grove that the two were not mutually exclusive. Many were friends for long periods of time. Others disliked me from the beginning, while some fluctuated in their own personal feelings to me and my work. Indeed, these fluctuations proved to be an important source of data as other residents would talk of the troubles so-and-so was having with me, or how these changes in behavior might indicate other troubles he or she might be having. The conversations the changes spurred on were seemingly endless.

I became quite close to Donna and Dan during my time in The Grove, and both helped Mike introduce me around the neighborhood. In fieldwork terminology, the three served as important "sponsors" for my work. I had a number of sponsors during my time in The Grove. By developing friendships with these residents, perhaps most notably Opal, the micro-politics of Shady Grove and its troubles talk became readily apparent. Because of my association with particular residents, other residents ignored or refuted my overtures. Some residents spoke negatively of me and my close contacts in the neighborhood. Margaret Thompson, alluding to my close association with another Grover, asked me, "Chris, why do you hang around with that woman? I don't like her." Helen, speaking of other residents, told me that, "I don't like these people."

One particularly noticeable incident illustrates these feelings quite well. As Donna led me around Shady Grove meeting residents, she introduced me to Eve. After a brief introduction, Eve looked at us closely, and told Donna to "go away." After asking Eve why she had done this, she explained that Donna was not an official employee of the housing authority.

Donna commented soon after the events that she was disturbed by Eve's behavior. She had long considered Eve a close friend and was deeply hurt by Eve's insistence that she leave. Though my association with Donna did not hurt my relationship with Eve over time, the event served as an initial warning to me that social relationships among the elderly in Shady Grove were quite precarious and shifting in nature.

My research was hardly mentioned as time went by in The Grove. Instead, I found myself accepted as part of the culture. Mike called me "one of the guys." In a sense, she was correct. My work in Shady Grove succeeded because I was, as seen by residents, truthful and trustworthy. They could confess to me their troubles and problems, talk that was to become the focus of my work.

What is not obvious is the excruciating work that the fieldworker must put in to maintain this presence and perception. This requires the difficult balancing of ongoing relationships, new events and specific incidences that occur among members of a site. Fieldwork is exactly what is says it is, work, and much of this labor is expended in the maintenance of relationships in the field.

"Learning the Ropes"

"Learning the ropes" is a process that is best described as "hanging around," and is a basic requirement for fieldwork in any setting (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:85). It translates into participating in the daily lives of those studied, observing the ongoing and repeated occurrences and activities of a site, listening to what is said, and focusing one's questions and analysis of the talk and activities of a site as the fieldwork develops. David Matza explains that as one enters into and studies a particular social environment,

> the researcher must learn to appreciate the distinctive concerns and ways of behaving in the world that he or she is observing and, 'to comprehend and to illuminate the subject's view and to interpret the world <u>as it appears to him</u>.' (1969:25; as cited in Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:83; emphasis in original)

My attention to and appreciation of the daily activities and rituals particular to Shady Grove was gained through eight months of ethnographic fieldwork. The fieldwork began during November of 1997 and continued without interruption until June of the following year. During this time, I spent four to five days a week, three to five hours at a time, visiting with the residents. I ate breakfast, lunch and dinner with the Shady Grovers. I went to movies, watched their favorite television shows, and even exercised with them. In addition, I spent numerous hours driving residents on their errands and in some cases running their errands for them. I bought mullet and catfish at a fish market, peach flavored snuff at the supermarket, moved furniture and residents to different units, and assisted residents in vacuuming carpets and waxing floors. All of this incorporated "hanging around," and allowed me to gain an "intimate familiarity" (Lofland 1976:8; as cited in Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:83) with Shady Grove and its particular characteristics.

By learning the ropes of Shady Grove, I developed my research topic of troubles talk and community formation in the particular geographical confines of the neighborhood.

Following this, Gubrium (1991b) suggests that a particular way of orienting to a field research site is to analytically view the activity there as occurring within the boundaries of a local culture. Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz (1983), the author defines local culture as,

> composed of recognizable categories, familiar vocabularies, organizational mandates, personal and professional orientations, group perspectives, and other delimited frameworks for organizing meaning. Its domains are relatively bounded and distinct; small groups; formal organizations; social collectives organized around characteristics like race, gender, or age; and other relatively circumscribed provinces develop their own modes and materials for reality construction. (1997:172)

As an example, Gubrium (1991b) discusses his fieldwork in support groups for caregivers of Alzheimer's disease patients (Gubrium 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1988). One group had an atmosphere that was friendly, others had moderators who were very forceful and harsh in encouraging group participants to think in particular ways. Others, "were inclined to let participants develop their own sense of the relationship" (Gubrium 1991b:133). As a whole, each support group could be quite distinct and singular as a local culture, "even though all dealt with the problems of caring for senile family members at home" (1991b:133).

Shady Grove provides us with distinct meanings, orientation to these meanings, and specific constructs and frameworks for the processing of experience there. The housing authority that manages Shady Grove has numerous public housing complexes, and there are many elderly public housing neighborhoods and complexes across the United

States. These complexes and their residents deal with similar issues. As impoverished citizens, they find problematic those mundane routines of everyday life that many of us take for granted, such as the payment of rent, the buying of groceries, and the sending of presents to relatives on holidays. As public housing residents, there is the ongoing struggle with the managing housing authority over these same rents, the condition of units, and maintenance, as a whole, in the complex.

However, each orients to and circumstantially organizes these troubles in particular ways, pointing us towards what Gubrium (1991b) describes as place variation. To recognize the concrete meaning of these troubles in Shady Grave is not to recognize the same problems in other similar public housing sites. For example, in Shady Grove complaints about maintenance were often told and structured around a former maintenance worker in Shady Grove named Rick. Many times when I spoke with and observed residents complaining of maintenance and the poorness of their work, Shady Grovers would call up Rick as an "interpretive resource" (Gubrium 1997) to organize their present problems with maintenance activities and particular workers. As they complained of shoddy work on a heater they might say, "Rick wouldn't have done it that way. He was good, ya know." Or, as Audra once noted, "Ted don't know what he doing, but that young one that was here, Ricky, he was good." Rick served as a means, particular to the local culture of Shady Grove, to organize present work as poor in terms of the more accomplished work that they perceived Rick as doing.

In learning the ropes, as Gubrium (1991b) notes, "being there is not enough" (p. 140). The "ropes" of Shady Grove are particular to it, as are the "ropes" of any site, and

my work in the neighborhood involved taking the members' views, claims, and orientations seriously, continually participating in learning the social organization of everyday life in Shady Grove. As I drove them, ate with them, walked with them, and talked with them, I took their complaining seriously, gaining bearings on what they were saying and in turn, accomplishing, as they talked of their everyday troubles.

"Leaving the Field"

Ethnographers have discussed the process of leaving the field in exact and excruciating detail. The process has been described as "easing out" (Junker 1960), and "drifting off" (Glaser and Strauss 1968). However, while these relevant discussions directly address leaving the field site, they do not concern themselves with the relationships between entering the site, the building up and formation of relationships, and the exit and possible return to the site. Maines, Shaffir and Throwetz (1980) state this most eloquently when they note that, "the leaving process is an aspect of an ongoing interplay between field circumstances and the way in which the researcher negotiates social relationships and a workable identity" (p. 273; as cited in Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:207). Though much of the literature on field exiting does not see the activity as hermeneutic in form (see Adler and Adler 1989; Altheide 1980; Maines et al. 1980; Roadburg 1980; Snow 1980), the "process" of exiting the field is bound within the varied components of field research. These include the planning of the research, its initiation, and the composing of the ethnography. Indeed, this process extends to the methods employed in maintaining relations with subjects long past the point where the original research project concluded.

In an earlier discussion, I mentioned that my entry into The Grove was obtained through the housing authority. My first opportunity to meet the residents of the neighborhood came at a barbecue sponsored by the housing authority. A memorandum was sent to Shady Grovers stating what I was going to be doing in Shady Grove as a researcher and the services that I would be providing to the residents. Interestingly, even when I told the residents that I was a graduate student at the university and would be performing research in the area, they ignored this, instead concentrating on my role with the housing authority and the duties I was to perform for them. To most residents I was not a researcher in the professional sense, but a friend, a driver, a confidant, and an errand runner. In short, I became someone they could depend on and whom they liked and cared for.

However, sometimes trouble occurred, such as when Donna threatened to call the police. Fieldwork in Shady Grove did not always "play out" as I myself was led to believe when I read handbooks and guidebooks on field research instructing me in forms of field research, membership, and the like. Instead, contingencies arose that directly disrupted what I thought should be occurring. Such contingencies, according to Shaffir and Stebbins (1991), "might include mistakes in participant observation, fractious relations with respondents, or the betrayal of confidences." (p. 209). The ongoing ways that the residents of Shady Grove oriented to my presence in the neighborhood, these disruptions, and my relationship with the housing authority, all had direct implications on the various ways that I exited the field, and continue to do so. These relationships, as Taylor (1991) discusses, "directly influence the dynamics of the exiting" (p. 208).

Perceived as an employee of the housing authority by a few residents, I often was given direction to, "tell Ms. Thompson that . . ." or when one was upset with me, "I'm going to let Ms. Thompson know about you." In short, my relationship there was seen by many Shady Grovers more in terms of expected duties and their performance. I was expected by these residents to take their complaints to Ms. Thompson and to take them on their errands. If I did not, I was not fulfilling my position as a housing authority employee specifically assigned to Shady Grove. Twice, complaints were called in directly to Ms. Thompson in regards to my performance in the neighborhood.

Breaking direct relations with these residents was done in a much more official capacity than with others. An official memorandum was sent out by Ms. Thompson after I spoke with her about the conclusion of my work in Shady Grove. It was not listed on this memorandum that I was a researcher, only that I would be leaving Shady Grove. Those residents who saw me as an employee would ask me about which complex I was being assigned to, "you're just like those maintenance men, always moving around," and where I was going to seek employment after my time with the housing authority.

For those with whom I became personally involved as friends, the exit was much more complicated. They knew of my research work and would often ask me and joke with me about it. Opal asked, "Chris, you gonna write us old ladies up sexy?" Dan once remarked:

> I can't wait to see what you write about us. It'll probably be in the gossip pages with all these damn women around her. The whole thing will probably be about Donna and Opal. Donna with all her problems and Opal with her big mouth. Let's see, Mike too. About how she's always holed up in there [laughs].

The residents were aware that I would only be in The Grove for a relatively short period of time. I remember at least five occasions when residents would ask me how much longer I had before I left. When I told those Shady Grovers I had become friends with, some joked, "Well, I guess you used us up Chris." Others made sure that I told them that I would visit them frequently. In all cases, the exiting was not a clearly distinct step of the fieldwork in Shady Grove, but rather one of indeterminancy and fluidity determined by a field relationship based on friendship and intimacy.

An intriguing question remains; have I exited the field? Though my official fieldwork is completed, I still visit my friends in Shady Grove, as well as maintain contact with them by letters and cards. Many still call me at home. There are ongoing emotional attachments between myself and many of the residents and certain demands that continue to be placed upon me as a friend now, not as a researcher. I have told some what I am writing about and, when I visit, they make sure that they tell me some of their troubles, saying, for example, that these "new" troubles would be "good for the book." At least once a week, a resident has called to tell me, "here's some more stuff Chris."

Stebbins (1991) contends that we actually may never leave the field. His research concentrates on a variety of subjects such as baseball, theater, football, and music, magic and stand-up comedy. He is often asked questions by others concerning "what really goes on" with these subjects. Friends want to know about magic and how it functions as an illusion. In answering their questions, he himself revisits his data as he brings up experiences encountered in the field to converse about the ways in which magic functions.

I found the same occurred with my work in Shady Grove. Older friends and relatives will often ask me about my work, and will tell me of their troubles, or what they should do about these troubles. Some have asked about troubles in Shady Grove and compared them with their own. Acquaintances ask me about their parent's or grandparent's troubles and what should be done for them. The same occurs with those younger, who will compare their own troubles with those of the Shady Grovers, telling me that quite possibly the young have more troubles than the old.

I have attempted to provide a description of how my work in Shady Grove was actually done, not an organized ideal. Particular "rules of the field" were certainly bent and broken based on the demands and contingencies of Shady Grove, as well as my own personal characteristics and activities. An idealized construct is just that, an ideal, and not practical in its accomplishment. My entrances and exits, the relationships formed, and the field that I worked in was particular to both Shady Grove and my developing research.

CHAPTER 4
"THOSE PEOPLE" AND TROUBLES TALK

Referring to the way staff members of human service organizations make sense of and predict the destiny of elderly patients once they have been discharged to the community from an organized facility, Gubrium (1991a) describes a social typing process. He notes that "there is a way in which professional workers in organized care settings normally diversify, by classifying frail elderly into community types, what they otherwise treat as uniform" (p. 31). This alerts us to the everyday importance of social typing as a community constructing device.

Social typing is a very ordinary form of activity. As Alfred Schutz (1967, 1970) viewed it, it is part and parcel of everyday life, not just something that sociologists engage in, which was Weber's perspective. Social typing is a way of sharing with others the <u>common</u> sense of personal actions. For example, when we say that a particular activity is the "typical" behavior one sees in "those people," it turns these actions into a general category of action, something into which other activities could be placed.

This kind of everyday social typing regarding troubles is prevalent in Shady Grove. My view is that it is an important ingredient in community formation. In Shady Grove, many social types arise out of the commonly discussed troubles of the residents, talk of which builds its community.

However, the types are not simply there as pre-existing categories, but are continually called into existence in talk and social interaction. By engaging each other in conversation, residents discuss, organize, and reorganize social typifications common to the neighborhood. By doing this, residents express varied views on the types. Each of the common social types of Shady Grove are recognizable subjects of troubles talk by residents. As the Grovers talk of each other, there is a recognition of the common subjects which trouble them.

In Shady Grove, the use of social types serves as a means through which residents specify shared identities by establishing the types as comparison structures (Smith 1987). The social types spoken to become ways of interpreting and categorizing the normal activities of Shady Grove residents, typifying particular identities and artfully constructing the normal, typical form. As Gubrium and Holstein note, "categorization devices . . . present commonsense models for depicting what culturally known types of people are like, and how members of such categories may be expected to behave" (1997:142).

The form, or social type in this case, provides a commonsense means through which comparisons can be made between residents and expectations ordered. If one is thought to be of a particular social type, then the device is used to give order and coherence to particular actions vis a vis the actions of other particular social types. In doing this, "standard pattern rules" of behavior are applied in anticipation of particular actions by specified types (Smith 1978).

While there is continually social typing in Shady Grove, this chapter is focused on two that are at the center of the typing process: "cooped-up women" and "animal people."

More than any other indigenous types, these inform Shady Grovers of who they are and, by contrast, who they are not. Their common recognition in everyday talk, I maintain, is an important ingredient of the residents' shared sense of identity, informing them of their commonality as Grovers.

Cooped-up Women

Let's turn first to "cooped-up women." In her book <u>The Unexpected Community</u>, Hochschild (1973) alludes to a group of residents of Merrill Court called "poor dears." According to Hochschild, this designation refers to those located at the end of a hierarchical system of social types.

> There was a shared system of ranking according to which she who had good health won honor. She who lost the fewest loved ones through death won honor and she who was close to her children won honor. Those who fell short on any of these were often referred to as "poor dears." (1973:58)

The poor dear designation, "ran in only one direction" (1973:59). One would never attribute the designation to a person higher in the social hierarchy. Rather it was always imposed downward, thereby accentuating a sense of superiority to the individual who used it.

Hochschild argues that the use of the poor dear designation is a constructive ingredient of Merrill Court. By ranking residents based on health or good fortune, a distinct hierarchy is built from the ground up that is particular to Merrill Court, unbeknownst to those outside the cultural boundaries of the housing complex. In use, it actually communicates a part of what residents are, or could be, to one another. Hochschild explains, "Thus, a hierarchy honored residents at the top and pitied "poor

dears" at the bottom, creating a number of informally recognized status distinctions among those who, in the eyes of the outside society, were social equals" (1973:59).

While the designation cooped-up woman is similarly used in Shady Grove, allowing some residents to claim an identity superior to the other women in the complex because they are more "outgoing" and "fun," the designation allows for a greater latitude in constructing community. A cooped-up woman in Shady Grove might establish that she has chosen to be that way, "to get away from all these damn people. All they ever do is bother you." She might talk of others who are more cooped-up than she is, expressing a great deal of sorrow at their state of affairs. Others might refer to all Grovers as being cooped-up, wishing they would all socialize.

Cooped-up has varied usages as a form of social typing. In use, the designation artfully elaborates the category that it is as a shared entity. The constructed reality of cooped-up is a practical, cultural achievement (Gubrium 1992). Being cooped-up is not simply there, but is constantly elaborated, engaged with, and in short, actively constructed by those labeled as cooped-up themselves, and other Shady Grovers doing the labeling. The residents express a high level of concern, through talk, over those seen as cooped-up, the practical features of which further specify community.

It should be noted that the broader context of being cooped-up is a common theme of the literature on planned housing for the elderly (Sheehan 1986; Stephens and Bernstein 1984). Concern with those cooped-up, or the isolated, has long been a topic of great importance in sociological and wider gerontological research alike, often focusing on the elderly individual living alone, forms of social support available, and the troubles

associated with the support and accessing of it (see Alwin, Converse, and Martin 1985;
Eckenrode and Wethington 1990; Hughes and Grove 1981; Litwak 1985; Thompson and
Krause 1998). Note that, as in Shady Grove, the scientific literature constructs cooped-up
(i.e. isolation) as a troublesome social type.

In Shady Grove, neighbors might refer to one of the women as cooped-up but the
woman herself, and other neighbors, might talk as if she often has people visiting and is
actually not cooped-up at all. It is a type used to recognizably differentiate. This orients
us to the ongoing artfulness of its usage in the everyday talk of Shady Grove. There seems
to be a great disagreement, unlike in Hochschild's hierarchical system, over what exactly
the cooped-up are as a recognizable social type. Nonetheless, while there is disagreement,
common recognition in combination with ongoing usage forms commonalities--community
life.

Constructing Cooped-up Mike

Consider the resident named Mike, otherwise known as Eve Jackson. She is often
referred to by other residents as cooped up. Mike is 83 years old and is the only resident
who has lived in Shady Grove since it opened. She is a short, somewhat stooped over,
with gray, thinning hair that she covers with a red wig as soon as she leaves the house.
Mike has resided in a corner unit at the front of the second cul-de-sac for the past four
years. The unit is surrounded by a fence and Mike has grown a relatively high hedge, as
well as a large fir tree in front of her porch. This is part of the physical reminders to
residents that Mike is cooped-up.

Following Graig's (1993) argument, the physical environment around Mike's unit, "transmits symbolic messages that the average person reads like a lexicon" (Thompson and Krause 1998:S355). Mostly, she stays in her unit and only ventures out to see a few friends, usually dressed in one of her many wool hats and a plaid polyester coat. In combination, these factors contribute to the construction of Mike as cooped-up. In actuality, she is extremely outgoing and vivacious. So, it begs one to ask the question, what makes Mike cooped up? And how does this relate to community?

We can begin to answer these questions by turning to everyday troubles talk. Consider the troubles talk that developed one day as I sat at the kitchen table with Dan. His unit is located at the front of the second cul-de-sac but on the other side of the street from Mike. Unlike Mike's unit, there is no fence or any other barriers to interaction around the unit. Dan himself is a spry white male, 70 years of age. Like most Shady Grove residents, he has various health problems, due to both his age, and in his case, the result of service in the Armed Forces during World War II. He maintains a healthy outlook on life and is eager to engage in conversation about everyday happenings in Shady Grove or wider social issues. His unit is well lit and the shades are often raised, leaving the windows and doors open if the weather permits. The apartment is usually very clean. Dan is usually dressed in sweat pants and a shirt, well fitted and clean. Very outgoing and talkative, he refers to his unit as "the meeting place," where other residents often gather to talk.

As we sat chatting, drinking coffee, and eating scrambled eggs and toast early one morning, I remarked that I was worried about Mike since I had recently been to see her

twice and she had not come to the door. He waved his hand in front of his face,

dismissing the problem. As we both looked over at Mike's unit, the conversation

unfolded this way:

Chris:	Have you seen Mike around Dan?
Dan:	Oh yeah. She was over here the other day.
Chris:	Good. I was worried about her. She doesn't come to the door when I knock and she's usually there when I come to visit.
Dan:	Oh, she's just hiding out. She's hiding from her family or something. Always hiding from something. Surprised I ever see her to tell you the truth. Got family problems or something like that. Plus she's got the black butt. She watches them movies till about 6 or 7 in the morning. Them old movies. And then she sleeps all day. I'm sure she's asleep when you knock over there.

According to Dan, she was "over here the other day," which he dismisses as not

being of great importance. When I mention that I am worried, Dan responds that she is

actually hiding out, though this doesn't seem to be serious, concluding, "Oh, she's just

hiding out." According to Dan it is not an issue at all, and certainly not a pathological

behavior because she is, "always hiding from something. Surprised I ever see her to tell

you the truth."

However, following these comments, Dan alters his response and labels Mike as

cooped up. According to Dan, she has significant family problems. These cause her to

remain awake at night watching, "them old movies." In turn, she sleeps most of the day.

Roughly a week later, I arrived at Shady Grove after running an errand to the

grocery store for one of the residents. In front of the complex, a group of women were

congregated outside Margaret Williams' unit. After the women waved me over, I drove

into the parking lot outside Margaret's unit. All the women, a group of about seven, were

helping Margaret move out of her unit and into her daughter's apartment to help care for the daughter's new child. They were loading furniture into a mini-van and I assisted them in placing the furniture into the van. Opal sarcastically commented, referring to me, "At least you're good for something."

As I worked, Donna arrived and asked me in a derisive tone, "So I hear you are taking Mike to pay her phone bill?" At the time, I wasn't aware that I was to provide this service and a brief discussion ensued about Mike and her social status in the neighborhood. The following is an excerpt from that discussion:

Chris:	I didn't think so. I told her that I'd talk with her today on the phone, but she didn't mention anything about me taking her to pay any bills.
Donna:	[In a tone of voice that turns progressively angrier as she speaks] Well, that's what I heard. She shouldn't be using you for that. I told her that before. She used to walk all over the place paying things and now you have to give her rides. She needs to stop that, she can do it herself.
Opal:	Well, I sort of feel bad for her. The last two times I've been over there, she hasn't come to the door when I've knocked.
Donna:	She's been in there. Holed up.
Chris:	Dan said what it was.
Donna:	What is it?
Chris:	Something about how she's been staying up until 6 or 7 in the morning watching old movies or something and then sleeping all day.
Opal:	I tell you what it is. She's got Alzheimer's [Margaret nods her head in agreement].
Chris:	It wouldn't surprise me if she has it in the early stages.
Opal:	Every time I go over there and knock on her door it's wide open. She comes up there and asks who it is, like she don't know me from Adam's house cat. She knows me and after I tell her, she always says, "oh, I knew that."

From what begins as a rhetorical question regarding Mike abusing my transportation services, Donna retorts that "she shouldn't be using you for that, I told her

that before." But the talk then shifts to a feeling of sorrow, which Opal expresses so

succinctly, even with some reluctance, "Well, I sort of feel bad for her." The suggestion

of Mike being cooped-up is first breached as Opal points out that Mike has not answered

her door recently, a signifier for her initial concern with Mike's "strange" behavior.

Elaborating on Opal's point, Donna works to establish a firmer grounding for Mike's

behavior, saying in a matter-of-fact tone that she has certainly been in the house, "holed

up," so none could speak with her.

 Donna talks of Mike's behavior as if it were a matter of individual choice. Mike

willingly holes herself up. I interrupt and interject Dan's rational for her behavior. Opal

speaks up again, this time firmly stating a medical reason for Mike's behavior. After my

brief interjection, she embellishes her stance on Mike's behavior by shifting to an

experience she recently had in her interactions with Mike, further enhancing her argument

that Mike is indeed suffering from Alzheimer's: "She comes up there and asks who it is,

like she doesn't know me from Adam's house cat."

 In the above excerpt, Mike is constructed as cooped-up; the category is

problematized and then made pathological. It is, in short, a trouble that the residents are

concerned with and is accounted for in the everyday talk of individual differences among

Grovers.

 This is not a view held by all however, most notably Mike herself. Mike herself

has a much different interpretation of exactly what cooped-up is. From her vantage point,

if cooped-up is seen negatively, she does not belong to the category in any way. As an

example of this, let's revisit an incident discussed earlier. One day after Donna and I

returned from our usual afternoon walk, she offered to introduce me to residents whom

Mike and I were unable to visit. As noted earlier, Eve resides in the rear of same building

as Mike. We stopped to visit, first knocking on the door. No one answered the door

initially and we began to leave. But then, we heard Eve ask, "who is it?" She appeared,

demanding to know who was at her door. I told her who I was and that Donna was there

as well, whom I assumed Eve knew. She opened the door and asked in an inquisitive and

somewhat accusatory tone, "Is she with you?" I informed Eve that Donna had been kind

enough to introduce me to other Shady Grovers so they would be aware of my presence in

the neighborhood and could utilize my services. Eve looked at Donna angrily, squinted

her eyes, and said to me, "Come back when you are by yourself," and then promptly

slammed the door. Donna was aghast, suggesting that we visit Mike, since she was likely

to know of the reasons for Eve's "strange" behavior.

So we proceeded to Mike's unit. After explaining to Mike what had just occurred,

a brief discussion followed concerning how cooped-up Eve was. In the following excerpt,

listen as Mike describes how "strange" and cooped-up Eve is. In the process, she

recounts how helpful she herself is to those who live behind her, referring to them as the

cooped-up ones. In her comments, nothing is communicated about herself being cooped-

up, as other residents vehemently argue. Listen as Mike tells of her social relations with

her two neighbors, Eve and Olga:

> She's [Eve] always been a little strange but was nice enough. She's fallen and
> she's isn't doing well. Basically stays to herself back there, all cooped up in there.
> Her and Olga both. You never see them. Just like recluses. Olga used to put her
> garbage out but she was really sick, you know, and couldn't get it in very well, so
> for a long time someone would put it out for her, I don't know who, it could have

been her I guess, but then I would take it back for her. God, that went on for the longest time.

The two of us continued to chat about the unfortunate incident between Diane, Eve, and me. As the conversation unfolded, Mike talked of an old and dear friend that used to live in Shady Grove. While telling me of her friend, Larue, Mike turns being cooped-up into a positive thing based on an individual decision, not the negative predicament that others cast it as.

Mike:	Naah. That's why I live over here. So I don't have to see and hear everything. Now that Larue, you know, the one I told you about?
Chris:	Yeah.
Mike:	Well, she would sit out there on her front porch and then get on the phone [laughs]. She knew everything! I'd tell her just to leave me alone but we were always carrying on together. I miss her, God rest her soul.

In many other conversations, Mike describes herself as having made a practical choice in living where she currently does. She knowingly erected physical barriers and engaged in acts to deter face-to-face interaction with other residents. Prefacing her explanation for this, Mike notes, "When I first moved in here, everybody was good friends and nice people . . . most of them don't care anymore though." Vitally important to Mike is defending her privacy against the ongoing talk about others that seems to permeate the neighborhood. She, in opposition to Opal, Dan and many others, views their behavior as pathological and deviant and hers as inherently rational, logical and normal. In fact, she is rather ambivalent towards the reaction of the neighborhood to her minding her "own business down here."

I don't know people like I once did. I used to greet everybody that came in here until one day some old lady slammed her door in my face. That was it. When I

first moved in here everybody was good friends, nice people. Most of them moved away, I guess, or they are dead now. Larue even called me from Reno, Nevada and California where she died. She was a nice lady. Most of 'em don't care anymore though. Ms. Thompson [the Executive Director of the housing authority] let me have the end unit down here 'cause I was tired of seeing people all the time. Except for Dan and Mae, and Donna with the walking, I don't get around much, and I like it. Don't have to hear everybody gossiping and talking all the time. I'd rather not know what's going on out there. Mae will come over and ask, "did you hear what so-and-so did?" No, and I don't care. Just don't want to know. Don't care if they don't like me, 'cause I don't like them. I just mind my own business.

It's clear from these extracts and the many others like them that were recorded in the fieldwork, that being cooped-up is an important social type. Of course, there are differences of opinion conveyed about just who is cooped-up and why. Mike, for example, was explained by Opal as cooped-up because she has Alzheimer's disease, the assumption being that this causes Mike to withdraw. Mike, in contrast, provides moral rendering; one <u>chooses</u> to be cooped-up for the reason offered.

Regardless of who is right or wrong, the fact remains that a type over and above particular individuals is being refereed and hotly debated. The social type, in effect, is a shared construct, which it its everyday usage, as in these extracts, opens to consideration, time and again, something the residents have in common, even while they communicate differences in the extent each is the community type--cooped-up--in question.

Constructing Audra as Cooped-up

Extending this to resident Audra, we see further difference in what, in its repeated common reference, ties these tenants together. Audra uses cooped-up to describe the neighborhood as a whole. She tacitly involves herself in the construction of community by alluding to the overall trouble of a "disengaged" Shady Grave. To her, the residents of

Shady Grove are isolated and do not socialize properly, which she views as limiting any

chance of community construction.

Consider the following incident in this regard. Audra loves to talk and we

regularly conversed at great length. One Sunday afternoon, we had just returned from the

grocery store when a discussion of Shady Grove's being cooped-up developed. At this

point in my fieldwork, I had already noticed that certain residents were viewed as cooped-

up and that this was an important element of the ongoing community formation in the

complex. We had been discussing living arrangements when I asked the following

question:

Chris:	Audra, how do you like it living back there in your apartment?
Audra:	Oh, I like it alright. Some people so isolated here. I don't know how they go about makin' it.
Chris:	Do you like your neighbors, you know, the one's in the same unit I guess?
Audra:	They alright. Some aren't so neighborly though. I mean, they'll speak to you, but that's about it. Just don't talk much. I mean, I like to socialize, and get out, and they just talk to you, say hey and such. We're all elderly here, you'd think we'd get together or something.
Chris:	Be like a community, not just a neighborhood?
Audra:	That's it. Exactly. Stop being so cooped-up and do a little carryin' on [laughs]. We got so much in common, we really should do more together.

On the face of it, Audra is referring to the general lack of community at Shady

Grove. What Shady Grove could be because, as Audra puts it, "we have so much in

common," isn't extended to her. Yet, at the same time, in communicatively discerning

what Shady Grove is not, Audra coalesces the collection of individuals that compose the

residents into an entity, over and above their individuality. This troubles Audra and what emerges in her related troubles talk is a sense of something that could unite them.

Animal People

A second social type I regularly heard discussed were "animal people." Like cooped-up women, the category was something repeatedly used and shared in conversation, again especially in relation to the troubles, in this case, animal people posed for others. As with cooped-up women, animal people was used in different ways, but the fact that it was in common usage a reference to who the tenants were or were not, further built through troubles talk what they shared in common.

Consider the following incident in this regard. One afternoon, I stood in the Grove's back parking lot discussing with a number of residents another tenant in the complex. At one point, I asked if they could provide an in-depth description of the resident. One of the Grovers sarcastically replied, "Oh, she's just one of those damn animal people. There's tons of them around here. They just love animals." Thinking nothing of it at the time, I later heard similar remarks. Following from my developing understanding that community life at The Grove is continually built from troubles talk, these began to alert me to the sharp and pronounced dichotomy residents were making between themselves based on attitudinal differences towards the place of animals in the complex. In time, I learned that, according to Shady Grovers, you are either one of the "animal people" or you are not. Of course, in use, there are many distinctions and rough areas around which this type coalesces. This specifies the manner in which the category of animal people is itself constructed and orients users to something categorically shared.

Within the shared category animal people, there are two distinct usages. The category is subdivided into those that actually keep animals and those who feed the birds that inhabit the complex and surrounding neighborhood. Framed as troubles, talk of their related social types--bird feeders and animals owners--further distinguishes what Grovers categorically share in common.

Bird Feeders

Consider the bird feeders first. As noted earlier, Shady Grove lies between two ponds. The larger one, west of Shady Grove in an adjacent student apartment complex, is a very nice area with benches surrounding the pond and a large water fountain in the middle of the pond. The pond is filled with geese and ducks, and the birds regularly walk across Shady Grove to the pond located on the other side of the complex. Though many of the residents hate the birds, commonly referring to them as "those disgusting things," they would not be as upset if the birds simply waddled from pond to pond. Here is where trouble begins. The birds do not simply waddle to the other body of water but linger in Shady Grove, looking for food left out by residents. This is a point of great dissension among the residents, some of whom view the birds as "nasty creatures" while others see them as pleasurable. One resident, for example, remarked to me, referring to these birds, "They shore are pretty Chris. Just look at 'em. Brighten your day right up when you see them comin'."

So, are the birds a pleasure to have around or are they "vile creatures," as one resident refers to them? There is no consensus, though the majority of the residents see the birds as a negative feature of the neighborhood. One thing is clear to the bird haters,

the type that feeds them, the bird feeders, are breaking up the local order of things. The "feeders" provide Grovers with a source of complaint, which when discussed constructs the community life in its particular terms--between "them" and "us" who hate the birds-- thus further specifying the social contours of Shady Grove life.

My first introduction to an actual instance of "bird trouble" was when resident Diane and I returned to Shady Grove after a short walk to a nearby grocery store. As we entered the complex, a large group of birds flocked to us. I had heard talk of the birds moving and lingering around the neighborhood before but hadn't as yet been alerted to its social contours. When I pointed the birds out to Diane, it provoked this reaction:

Chris:	Look, there are those ducks everyone talks about.
Diane:	I have to stay away from them too. They have a lot of fleas.
Chris:	So you don't want them around then? Some people feed them though, don't they?
Diane:	Yeah, some of us like them out here and some don't. They live in that pond there (turns around and points at pond--ducks approach closer to us). Shoo ducks, shoo! I've got to stay away from them. Mike even feeds them. She says she doesn't but I've seen her. Told her about it too. But that's Mike, she does what she wants and there's nothing that is going to change her.

What is most notable in these comments is that she identifies Mike as a bird feeder, hinting at the ongoing moral battle on the premises over the birds. A crucial social dimension is marked by the statement, "Yeah. Some of us like them here and some don't."

A further problem, besides the social division indicated, is that Mike is Diane's friend, which magnifies its personal implications for Diane, who isn't a bird feeder. Diane noted, "Mike even feeds them. She says she doesn't but I've seen her. Told her about it

too." Diane, like others, acknowledges the social type, but more than others, is doubly implicated by not being one of "them."

Later, I sat at the "meeting place" with Dan, Donna, and Mike, who were drinking cups of coffee. As we talked, Donna began a conversation that referred to the ducks as a source of trouble. Mike, Donna, and Dan all agreed that the birds were a major problem of the neighborhood and a definite cause for concern among the residents. Indeed, one resident later remarked alarmingly that "they [the birds] are damaging our way of life." In an angry voice, Donna responded that the birds were, "pooping all over the place," whereupon a conversation unfolded centered on which residents fed the ducks and geese and which did not, implicating Mike especially.

Mike actually keeps a bird feeder in front of her unit and is in constant battle with the squirrels over the feeder, a situation she also laughed about. Mike loves birds and enjoys being around them. She once explained, "I love to watch birds Chris. They brighten us up some days. Especially when us old ladies are drunk and hung over."

On one occasion, Donna and I had walked up to visit Mike. We noticed three ducks eating bird seed spread around the feeder. Upon entering Mike's unit--friend or no friend--Donna quickly informed Mike of this and of the ducks in front of her unit, which led to the following:

Mike: Those damn things are always around. There's nothing you can do
            about it. They weren't eating out of the feeder were they? [I shake
            my head no] I hope not. I like to see the birds and they make such
            pretty sounds, unlike those damn ducks.
Chris: Some of ya'll like them and some of ya'll don't, right?

Mike:	That's right. I don't care, they just need to get rid of the things. We need to get the watch-a-ma-call it, the Humane Society or something, to come pick them up.
Donna:	[The housing authority] can do it Mike. John and them can pick them up.
Mike:	I called before. They said they're not allowed to do that or something, I don't know. Orin, though, he caught 18 of them one time, but he couldn't catch the male one, so they keep breeding.
Chris:	How did Orin catch them [laughs]?
Mike:	Put him a trap out. The male was to smart for him though.[laughs] They come from that water over there in Shady Grove and they travel across here to get to that other pond. Someone told me that there's another pond way back there, but I haven't seen that one//
Donna:	They're so ugly too. Disgusting.
Mike:	I know. They're not pretty like those Mallards. They have a Spanish name, can't remember what it is, some Spanish name.

Mike, the bird feeder, is noticeably upset and agitated that the ducks are eating her bird seed. There is an ongoing sense that though others might see her as a bird feeder, she certainly does not see herself as one, which, interestingly enough, further specifies the social type in question. To Mike, she is not "that" kind of bird feeder. In fact, at the end of the conversation, Mike substantiates her position by agreeing with Donna that the ducks are ugly, "not pretty like those Mallards," and in effect not worth feeding. Thus, as the subcategory (duck) bird feeder does not apply to her, she participates with Donna and I on this occasion in constructing preferred Shady Grovers in terms of whom she, Donna, and I are not.

Some residents reveled in their function as bird feeders. They regularly spoke of what they perceived were the concerns of other residents concerning the bird problem. Tenant Margaret, Donna's next door neighbor, once mentioned to me in a tone of high morality, that she was very proud of feeding the ducks.

I don't give a damn what the rest of these people say, I like to feed the damn
ducks and I'll be damned if their talking is going to stop me. The ducks, or geese,
or whatever they are, are pretty and they make me smile and I like that.

Tenant Carol is also an acknowledged bird feeder. She lives in the rear of one of

the buildings that faces the pond toward the back of the complex. One sunny day, we sat

together on her front porch drinking iced tea and discussing various issues that had

recently appeared in the local newspaper. A flock of ducks and geese appeared. In a

pleased voice, Carol asked me, "Aren't they pretty, Chris?" I agreed and asked her if she

fed the birds. She responded:

Oh yes. I always feed them. Why do you think they walk right by here (laughs)? I
love to watch them gather around, though that squawking can be rather loud
sometimes. Feed them whatever I can find, usually bread. Keeps me young you
know.

Carol's remarks stand in considerable contrast to what can be said about bird

feeders by residents. She takes pride in being a bird feeder, thus tilting the moral contours

of the activity in a decidedly different direction. The dimension of Shady Grove life that

centers on bird feeders is indirectly reproduced in her comments, but given a positive

value, further complicating the meaning of what Shady Grovers hold in common.

Animal Owners

Pets, too, figure as topics of troubles talk. There is a strong concern in the

neighborhood with those who keep pets in their possession. It is against housing authority

rules to own a pet, and pets are seen as annoying and obnoxious by many Shady Grovers.

Still, in some instances, consideration is given to whether this does constitute a trouble.

Many pet-owners mange their pets in ways that other resident's do not see as troubling,

such as keeping the pets inside their units. Shady Grovers who do own pets view

themselves as above the issue. As one commented, "I really don't know what the big deal

is. I've had [the pet] forever."

This was brought home to me one morning when Donna and I were visiting Opal.

Opal's unit is "clean and tidy," as another female resident of the complex once

commented. Mid-conversation, Opal and Donna began to sound argumentative. The two

friends were discussing Opal's neighbor, Mae, and her cat. Both Donna and Opal were

visibly upset over this. It was obviously a source of grave concern. At one point, the

following exchange took place:

> Opal: The cat shits on the front porch every night and Mae has to wash it
> off in the morning. I see her doing it.
>
> Chris: Why would she do that?
>
> Donna: I don't know. The cat poops everywhere and it's just nasty.
>
> Opal: It used to be real mangy, flea-bitten. I wouldn't let [her grandson]
> near it.
>
> Chris: She doesn't have a litter box?
>
> Donna: I guess not and the cat doesn't even cover it up when they're done.
> I know it doesn't. Go in her house, it smells awful. You've been in
> there? [I nod my head yes]. The thing has sprayed everywhere.
> Once a cat does that you can't get it out

At the same time, Mae is well liked in Shady Grove. Grovers respect Mae as a

person and care for her, both physically and emotionally, because of her ill health and

continuous family problems. Mae has lived in Shady Grove longer than anyone but Mike.

She is seen as a friend and confidant by many, and it is quite unlikely that Mae would be

doing anything troubling to others. However, the animal trouble is seen as very serious

and is figured by some to be a good reason to cast Mae as a troublemaker, no matter how

difficult this might be.

The seriousness of the animal owner troubles became more apparent as Opal and Diane shared their own troubles with me. The related conversation took place one day in Opal's unit. I was present when both complained how very upset they were that so many residents "[break] the rules." They turned to Mae's "big old cat" as an example, and how, as one of them put it, "it shits everywhere dammit, on my car, on the porch, on the sidewalk." In a sense, this particular trouble, the trouble of Mae's pet ownership, is a trouble because of its visibility. This point is underscored as Diane and Opal continued their discussion concerning the problem with animals in Shady Grove, attending to the actions of specific residents. One complaint centered on Gitana.

> I think they call her 'Gypsy.' She lives over there by Dan. Across from him. She's got at least four cats and they are always out roaming, getting into things. The problem is the cats are out-and-about, getting into things.

On another occasion, considerable troubles talk centered on a Vietnamese resident and her dog. Opal remarked to me, "that Vietnamese woman has this dog and she keeps it out on the porch and all it does is bark every time you walk by it. Yap! Yap! Yap!" After Diane and I left Opal's apartment, she escorted me to the outside of the apartment of, "that old Vietnamese woman." There is a small dog on the front porch barking loudly. As we passed by, Diane remarked, "See, I told you so. The little thing is just irritating. That's really the only word for it."

What if the animal is not visible? Does it figure as a source of troubles talk? Is it used to account for what's "happening" to the neighborhood? In the same conversation between Diane and Opal regarding various animals in the neighborhood and the troubles they cause, I asked the two friends about Wilma's dog, mentioning that in my encounters

with Wilma, the dog, a Chihuahua, had always seemed well behaved and quite. Listen as the two friends cast the situation differently:

Opal:	Wilma doesn't ever let that dog out. It stays in that cage you just talked about most of the time I think. I feel sort of sorry for it. And Wilma's place is so dark. You hardly ever see her either.
Diane:	Where does it go to the bathroom Opal?
Opal:	I think it shits in the litter box.
Chris:	A cat litter box?
Opal:	Yeah, can't you just see it. I don't really know. I just heard that from Carol.

Here again, the general category of animal keeper, which is broadly viewed as troublesome, does its work. The trouble that kept animals are seen as causing, serves to construct an unseen problem into a shared knowledge of what Wilma's dog represents--a marker of what "we" are not in this community.

Conclusion

The social types discussed here, cooped-up women and animal people, are not categories that exist in-and-of-themselves but construct a community centered on related troubles. The talk that relates to these types, I argue, accomplish community at Shady Grove. This points us to the ongoing micro-political work that is done to identify who the residents are and are not, marking the interactional borders of Shady Grove. These shared distinctions-in-use construct community. Among Grovers, statements such as, "some of us like them and some don't," alert us to the everyday work of community construction.

The related disagreements and consensus further alert us to the working solidarity at Shady Grove, whose concern for troubles types signals their public identities. It is their concern with them and their intensive efforts to make them locally meaningful that define

who and what they are in relation to each other. In other words, the stuff that makes up the working reality of Shady Grove as a community grows out of repeated ordinary references to the varied troubling types as seen by each resident. Anything less would signify a collection of strangers, whose doings, comings, and goings wouldn't matter at all.

CHAPTER 5
CELEBRITY AND TROUBLE

Among Shady Grovers, the two residents spoken of most often as troublesome in everyday conversation are tenants Orin and Donna. Each is a virtual celebrity of trouble. Their status as an endless source of troubles talk presents them as everything Shady Grovers are not. In this regard, they are, in talk and interaction, a source of solidarity, continuously anchoring and fueling the growth and enduring existence of Shady Grove as a community.

Orin and Donna's behavior was a source of ridicule, anger, support, and bafflement. In fact, as my fieldwork in Shady Grove drew to a close, Donna's conduct almost solely dominated conversation between residents. Since I was seen by residents as being very close to Donna, they often asked how she was doing, how she was acting, and if "she was holdin' up."

Orin remained an enduring presence, a gadfly of the neighborhood, throughout my fieldwork. His very actions, grandly portrayed and enacted, seemed to quickly move into conversation among Shady Grovers. Gadfly he might be, he also was the source of considerable exasperation to others as a result. Repeatedly, I heard, "Can you believe what Orin did today?" Both he and Donna were the negative standard by which Shady Grovers evaluated their actions. Related troubles talk nourished community, anchoring it

in this instance in these two visible members, whose biographical particulars signaled a very visible identity.

Biographical Work and the Construction of Celebrity

According to Gubrium and Holstein, "biographical work" relates to,

> a life and its story [as] interpretive accomplishments, created sustained, and transformed through social interaction. If a life comes to have a distinct course of development, with phases, stages, peaks, or plateaus, this is as much a matter of getting the story into shape, as it is patterned progression through time. (1997:156)

Inherent to the concept is that biography is always the biography-at-hand. That is, what is told is dependent upon the circumstances in which the story unfolds, " the specific context provides guidelines for what is relevant to incorporate into a biography" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:158). The story constructed is dependent on available interpretive resources, such as Orin and Donna's persons might provide. It must be built up, brick by brick, by accessible resources in a local culture.

In Shady Grove, this emerges in two particular manners. First, the troubles of these celebrities are themselves used to engage and communicate the retrospective biography of Shady Grove. Second, celebrity talk also points us to the future of Shady Grove, as residents, using the troubles of Donna and Orin as resources, contemplate what the place will be like in the future. Finally, immersed in the social context of Shady Grove, troubles talk is built around celebrity troubles in order to communicate the biographies of Orin and Donna as integral parts of the social world of Shady Grove.

Orin's Celebrity

How does Orin figure, in particular, in community formation in Shady Grove?

Orin is a "strange one," as one resident put it. In fact, when I was an employee of the

housing authority years ago, Orin was known as a "rare bird," as another resident stated.

Many in the urban area in which Shady Grove is located know Orin by sight, though not

by name. Orin wakes up every morning and mounts his three-wheeled bicycle, ready to

ride though the day, running his many errands. The bicycle is brightly colored with big

handlebars and a large wire basket attached to the basket. Orin has a flag in support of the

local university attached in the rear. He is immediately recognized by residents of various

apartment complexes surrounding Shady Grove. As I talked with a group of college

students in a nearby complex one afternoon, they asked me if I knew the "bike rider." I

said yes and inquired as to how they knew Orin. One replied that "you can't miss him.

He rides all through the apartment complex, waving to everyone."

Demanding attention, Orin is often dressed in either a bright green or yellow

leisure suit. As he told me one time laughingly, "I just like to be noticed, and let me tell

you, these suits sure do the trick." He is vivacious and outgoing, possessing what many

think is a bit too much energy for a man his age. "That boy just got a little too much get

up and go, I think," tenant Dan said once. In fact, Orin's awkward behavior sometimes

leads to his sexuality being questioned by others. Before actually physically entering

Shady Grove, I had asked John, the Maintenance Director, about many of the residents,

including Orin. John replied:

What is there to say? [laughs] He's a fruit too. Always something wrong with the toilet. Kept calling last year all the time about that damn toilet. There was something a little fishy. Think he just wanted to look at Rick's [a maintenance man] whacker. I don't know, Orin's always been a little strange riding that bike around and shit.

Still, Orin assists many of the residents with their needs and is there if they need help. But, many times he simultaneously intrudes into other's personal space. As Mae once phrased it to me over a piece of cake on a Sunday afternoon, "I shouldn't talk like this, but he's always putting his nose up other people's ass." No matter what actions Orin takes in Shady Grove, attention is called to him, and in many ways he works to attract this attention. He is, in all facets of the term, a local celebrity, in this regard, serving as a prominent example in talk for distinguishing who Shady Grover's are from what they shouldn't be.

First, consider how Orin as celebrity figures in Donna's troubles talk, as it developed one sunny afternoon. At roughly 1:00 pm, Donna and I were going for an extended walk, chatting about various residents as well as her own health problems. As we talked, the "Eve incident," as one resident called it, emerged as a topic of conversation. Recall that the "Eve incident" occurred when Donna introduced me to Eve and she brusquely commanded Donna to leave. Listen as Donna talks about the incident and note the point where Orin enters in the story, figuring as a nuisance:

Donna:	Have you heard anything from that woman [referring to Eve]?
Chris:	Which woman?
Donna:	You know, the one that wouldn't let us in last time.
Chris:	No, but I'm going to visit her today.
Donna:	I don't know what got into her. It was rude and disrespectful Chris and it still bothers me. I had just saw her before Christmas and gave her a Christmas card. I saw her after that and she said it was

the perfect card, "That it suits me perfectly." I don't know, I just buy cards, but Eve said it fit her, then I guess it fit. [laughs] So I don't know what's wrong Chris. There's never been anything between us.

Chris: You think Orin had anything to do with this?

Donna: Oh, I know he did [becomes stern and voice harder]. Well, I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure of it. He's always over there talking with people. I don't say anything to him anymore. I saw him the other day, and just said "Hi" to him and that was all. He knows I know now. I'm not sure how, but he knows what happened. Somebody told him.

Chris: Orin gets around here, huh?

Donna: Yeah he does! I'll tell you, when I was moving in here in my old place, I had my whole family helping me, my sons and all. Big, large muscular boys. You saw Butch that day, right? Well, Orin comes gallivanting up and asks if he can help. Comes back four or five times! I don't need his help. I'm really sick right now, but I have my boys to help and they are doing everything. I don't need to deal with him. Orin keeps coming by, asking me if I want his phone number? So he runs off and writes that, telling me if I ever need anything, just to let him know.

Donna first turns the conversation towards what, by now, had become a well-known incident in Shady Grove, the "Eve incident." As Mike put it once, "That little thing Donna and Eve have going on." After a brief discussion of the particulars of that occurrence, the conversation drastically changes as I ask, "You think Orin had anything to do with it?" Though Donna does express some uncertainty over Orin's involvement-- "Oh, I know he did. Well, I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty certain of it"--it is evident that she feels that Orin is the culprit. Obviously upset with him, she points to Orin as someone she cannot trust, someone who knows too much. As Donna explains, "He knows I know now. I'm not sure how, but he knows what happened."

Donna takes the previous comment of Orin as someone who is too knowledgeable, who is "sneaky," and returns to a major local incident in order to construct Orin as the

person she currently considers him to be. Orin is too energetic in his willingness to help, a theme that emerges often in troubles talk regarding him. He is persistent in his efforts to assist Donna in her moving process even though his help is not needed. As Donna explains, "I don't need his help. I'm really sick right now, but I have my boys to help and they are doing everything. I don't need to deal with him."

Donna constructs an image of Orin as someone who doesn't know "when to stop." He is often viewed in the same manner by other residents, a topic to which I turn shortly. Orin is the one who "gallivants" around, asking for phone numbers, and intruding upon other's privacy, a mantra that is repeated over and over by other residents.

Consider how tenant Margaret Williams constructs a picture of Orin's past. The following is an extract from a long conversation Williams and I had regarding Orin and his behavior. It's evident that Margaret has little regard for him.

> He's always spreading rumors about you or anybody else, talking in his slick way. I'd love to just tag him one. My son taught me some things. I may be little but I'll stand up for myself. He always talks about how he used to work for a lawyer, using these big words to impress you. But I worked for a law firm too, and they taught me how to spot a phony, and I guarantee you, Orin fits that description. We'd all be better off if he's just leave or die or something. I know I would.

Margaret opens with a statement that anchors the rest of her talk, establishing a frame from which the story progresses, "He's always spreading rumors about you or anybody else, talking in his slick way." As she continues, the talk turns to Orin's past and his presentation of it: "He always talks about how he used to work for a lawyer," and how he uses this to, "impress you." Using this, Margaret constructs Orin as a "phoney" because she has had similar experiences in her past. In the end, Margaret points us

towards the future, a future without Orin that would make Shady Grove a nicer place,

especially for her, thus implicating what the Grove could be as a community in terms of

what her portrayal of Orin states it shouldn't be.

Donna's Celebrity

The other celebrity, Donna, didn't take on this persona as willingly as Orin did.

When I first arrived in Shady Grove, meeting and talking with a few residents at a

barbecue sponsored by the housing authority, I sat down at the end of a table where four

women, all of whom seemed to be friends, were talking. Donna approached as the women

discussed daily happenings and current events. She is 66 years old and at the initiation of

my fieldwork was well-kept, outgoing, and energetic. The women seemed to flock to her,

gathering around and asking numerous questions. As I was to learn later, Donna had

recently received a heart transplant and was recovering from the operation. She was

doing wonderfully and the women seemed as proud of her as she herself seemed to be,

"she walks everyday," one said proudly, "all the way to Winn Dixie and back."

Donna and I became close friends early during the research process, often going on

long walks together. Her health was good at the time and she often called me about our

walks. As she would say, the calls were to, "get [my] lazy butt going."

Donna's good health did not last. After a routine medical exam did not go as

planned, Donna seemingly "lost her shit," as Opal so succinctly put it. After the exam, she

entered into a deep depression, rarely emerging from her unit as time went by in The

Grove. It was the two polar extremes, the Donna everyone knew and could be proud of,

and the depressed and reclusive Donna, that produced a troubles talk coalescing around an identity based on extremes.

Listen to the two extremes of talk about Donna. Diane explained to me that the female Shady Grovers were very proud of Donna. They saw her as a inspiration to continue struggling through their own troubles. Diane summed up these feelings when she noted, "you know Chris, all us women, we're proud of her. She's made it back. You should have seen her before. It makes me think that sometimes and I try to do it."

In contrast, other residents saw Donna in a much different light. Accordingly, their troubles talk developed much differently. Consider Margaret Williams' talk of Donna. A close friend of Donna's when she was well, her feelings towards Donna changed dramatically as Donna's behavior worsened. Ms. Williams' concerns over Donna are representative of many resident's concerns and troubles with her. The following statement of Ms. Williams echoes these feelings well. As Ms. Williams and I sat together on her front porch, she remarked that, "Donna is just a bitch and that's all there is to it. I feel sorry for her, don't get me wrong, but she just needs to stop." There is both a tone of anger and a sense of compassion as Margaret tells me of her troubles with Donna. Her behavior stirred up many emotions among the residents, and in turn, a sometimes overwhelming troubles talk. However, this was a troubles talk different than that associated with Orin. While Orin's talk was overwhelmingly negative, Donna's talk encompassed both negatives and positives, perhaps in the same sentence. Margaret Williams' comments are exemplary of this, pointing us towards the various ways that celebrity can be used as an anchor for community construction and troubles talk.

Celebrity and Shady Grove

While biographical work is employed to construct celebrity, implicating Grover identity, it is also utilized more broadly to construct Shady Grove as a community in its own right. Take two particular instances in which Orin is artfully used as a biography-building resource in the constitution of Shady Grove as a community. In the first, Diane and I were visiting Mike when a flock of geese waddled by. As the geese milled around, Mike commented that,

> those damn things are always around. There's nothing you can do about it. They weren't eating out of the feeder, were they? I hope not. I like to see the birds and they make such pretty sounds, unlike those damn ducks.

This troubles talk set the tone for Mike bringing Orin into the story. In the developing plot, Orin becomes someone that had previously worked to remove the ducks and geese from the neighborhood. The biography of Shady Grove unfolds in relation to Orin's attempted removal of the fowl. Mike comments that she had called the housing authority to rid Shady Grove of the ducks at one point and they were unable to do so: "They said they're not allowed to do that or something." Mike adds, "Orin caught 18 of them one time, but he couldn't catch the male one, so they keep breeding." But this doesn't necessarily lend Orin a positive bias, but rather is further troubling. Orin, in other words, becomes part of the <u>ongoing</u> problems with the ducks and geese, the implication being that Shady Grove would be better off without all of them.

In the second instance, Margaret and I discuss Orin in the context of the many troubles he causes her. Orin is used by Margaret as a (celebrity) resource to construct a sense of inappropriate neighborliness, and in turn further specifies what she currently

thinks of Orin. In doing this, Margaret links Orin's biography to a contrasting sense of what a proper neighbor shouldn't convey. Margaret puts it this way:

> This woman over there in the corner [points in that direction], I mean the one that used to live there. I think her name was Eve. She used to always borrow things from us. Of course, Orin was glad to help, always tooling around. Show how much he had. People like him don't even belong in here. She would come over to me, used to go to Olga's too, and ask for money and cigarettes and such [elaborates].

Celebrity Friendships and Troubles Talk

In Shady Grove, the support most often relied upon is a tenant's friendship with other tenants. Though there certainly are tenants who depend on family for support, a subject I will return to shortly, the majority of the tenants' informal support comes directly from neighbors.

The relationship between friends, neighbors, and social support has been reported on extensively in the literature (see Alwin, Converse, and Martin 1985; Blieszner and Adams 1992; Cantor 1979; Furman 1997; Hughes and Gove 1981; Jerrome 1992; Litwak 1985; Sheehan 1986). Two of these studies bear closer consideration, one for its use of qualitative research into friends, aging, and community and the second for its direct analysis and appreciation of the relationship between public housing, neighbors, and informal support. The first of these, <u>Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture</u> (1997), is an ethnography of Julie's International Salon. Julie's is a beauty salon whose patrons are overwhelmingly older, middle-class Jewish women. Author Frieda Kerner Furman's empirical material presents the diverse culture that exists among the elderly women who frequent Julie's. Among varied considerations, including feminist

concerns with the aging female body and family, Furman pays close analytic attention to the role of elderly women's friendships and their relationship and role in the ongoing practical construction of community among the patrons.

Furman points eloquently to the relationship of similar traits, the bonds of friendship, and the social support that form community at Julie's.

> At Julie's International Salon, the customers' shared gender and age--among other factors--give rise to a lively community where women unabashedly discuss their aches and pains, their facial lines and double chins . . . The prohibitions of the public sphere against speaking about these matters are suspended. The beauty salon emerges as a site of support, friendship, and yes, moral action. Women engage in caring work with each other in the course of their weekly visits to Julie's, giving and receiving care in both subtle and obvious ways. Whereas in public, older Jewish women may be perceived as Other, inside the salon they develop a community of selves. (1997:5-6)

As Furman observes the talk and social interaction that forms the community-at-work, she considers the relationships that the women have with each other. Western views of friendship, she suggests, have been "colored" by the philosophy of Aristotle, who,

> placed various forms of friendship into a hierarchy, moving up from acquaintances, to companions, to intimates. In this view acquaintances are plentiful, companions fewer, and intimates few and far between in a person's life. In other words, for Aristotle the quality of friendships and their quantity are inversely related: The more friends you have, the lesser the quality of the friendships; the fewer, the higher. (1997:27)

As a philosophical consideration of the nature of friendship, this suggests that the relationships at Julie's are fleeting and not long lasting. Instead, they are grounded in the social walls of the beauty shop. These friendships, if they are to be considered as such, are lesser than those that exist on a more permanent and long-standing basis outside.

Furman argues against a hierarchical, moral judgement of friendship. Instead, she suggests that friendships may exist at various cultural locales and their location in such sites does not diminish their moral value or meaning.

> Beauty-shop friendships, then, may be seen as neither better nor worse than other friendships. They are different from other friendships, perhaps, because they are limited to a particular space and time, but the significance of such relationships is not thereby diminished; rather, it is particularized. (1997:27)

While there has been a great deal of discussion regarding friendships among the elderly, there has been little dialogue regarding the problems associated with friendships, a situation true in a variety of contexts beyond that of the aged (Blieszner and Adams 1992; Hansson, Jones, and Fletcher 1990). According to Blieszner and Adams (1998), only two studies have discussed conflict in senior friendships (Dykstra 1990; Fisher, Reid, and Melendez 1989), and only one focused on betrayal in older adult friendships (Hansson, Jones, and Fletcher 1990). Importantly, "no reports focused particularly on the processes through which friendship problems evolve late in life or how older adults handle friendship discord" (Blieszner and Adams 1998:224). If one were to glance at the literature, the reader would see little evidence of troubles among elderly friends.

Blieszner and Adams suggest a multidimensional nature to friendship troubles among seniors that is situationally located and articulated through both structural and psychological considerations. This combination create unique lived experiences for day-to-day interactions among elderly friends. Building on this foundation, Blieszner and Adams advocate a typology of friendship troubles constructed around the internal structure of friendship, its external factors, and problems with interactive processes.

Listen to one of the seniors interviewed by the authors as she discusses a problem with a friend in this way:

> She married a jerk. No one likes him. Do you know that when I telephone her that he has to listen to the conversation? She's just a changed person since she's married him; she's just ah, she was a very independent person, free and easy with me. And she married this guy and she just doesn't . . . As I said, she doesn't make phone calls without him listening, she just doesn't do anything without him. She was a widow for many years and lived her own life, and owned a home, had lots of things, had a lot of set of friends, and now he doesn't want her to have any other friends and he doesn't want her to do things.

Her narrative initiates with the statement, "she married a jerk." The opening comment about a "bad marriage," is articulated and expanded throughout the story. As her narrative develops, she turns to the effect that the marriage has had on her friend, commenting that, "she's just a changed person since she's married him . . . had a lot of set of friends, and now he doesn't want her to have any other friends and he doesn't want her to do things."

The excerpt points to an external factor, the husband, who is the cause of the problems between the 72-year-old woman and her longtime companion. She has, "married this guy," and now the woman and her friend are not nearly as close as they once were.

But how is this related to community? Due to the pervasiveness of friends as social support mechanisms in Shady Grove, they are regularly topics of conversation. As an ongoing practical concern, friendships are maintained, altered, sustained, and problematized not just in terms of their supportive function, but also in terms of their related troubles. There is an intersection of friendships and troubles within the web of

social relations in Shady Grove. It is, as Frieda Kerner Furman discusses, a lively community practically constructed through both support and troubles talk of friends in their ongoing concern with the vicissitudes of everyday relations with them.

Here in this lively community we find Donna and Orin and their surrounding troubles talk. Donna's talk finds itself embedded in long-standing friendships and supportive relationships, and develops accordingly. On the other hand, Orin's troubles are immersed in his relationship with a neighbor, Margaret. Her strong dislike, perhaps an understatement, of Orin, is legendary among Grovers and housing authority staffers as well. Margaret went so far as to tell me that she and Orin were "sworn enemies." According to residents, her hatred of Orin has reached an almost pathological level. As Olga told me, "Orin has consumed her. He's probably going to spit her back out soon." Their relationship and its troubles are a vital part of Shady Grove's shared body of knowledge and a necessary contributor to the lively community that exists there.

Donna's Friendships and Troubles Talk

Donna's troubles talk provides an intriguing example of the intersection between family and friends. As previously discussed, the social support relied upon by the majority of those who live in congregate housing is one's friends/neighbors, primarily due to the proximity of support. However, this is not to state that family is to be disregarded as a support mechanism. Extending the arguments of Bleiszner and Adams, Brody (1985) suggests that they too are employed in providing logistical and caregiving support to an elderly family member in a mutually supportive intersection with friends. Among Grovers,

these dual support mechanisms are most readily visible in the case of Donna and her

struggles.

Her initial move to Shady Grove was due to its proximity to her children. At the

time, her caregiving needs were quite high due to a failing heart. Illustrating this, listen as

Donna comments on her move to the complex:

> Well, I was living up in Illinois and my heart was starting to get bad so my
> children, there are two of them here, wanted me to come down here so they could
> look after me. My doctor had already classified me as disabled and all due to my
> heart, so I moved in here.

Within two years after hear move to Shady Grove, her condition deteriorated to

the point that she needed and received a heart transplant. A few residents and her family

joined together into a very tight, close-knit support circle. Together, family and friends

worked together in helping Donna return to a normal lifestyle. Until a significant problem

arose during my time there, they were quite successful.

In a routine monthly, medical examination, the doctors discovered that Donna was

suffering from sever Osteoporosis. Other conditions were identified by the doctors,

though Donna never clearly illuminated what these were. The diagnosis sent Donna

spiraling into a deep depression. Her poor mental condition served as the anchor around

which troubles talk emerged.

Donna's family quickly came to her aid. Soon after the diagnosis, Donna

attempted suicide. As a result, Peter, her eldest son, stayed with his mother over a two

week period. According to friends, Donna finds it difficult to ask family for assistance,

and did not request her son's help. Consider Dan's thoughts on Donna's troubles with her

family. He notes that although Donna's children are willing to "do anything for her," she finds it difficult to request assistance from them.

> She doesn't want to be a burden to them. She just doesn't want to tell them. And whenever she has a problem that's bad enough for her to tell 'em, and let me tell you, it's got to be bad, they rush over and treat her A-1.

Now, listen to the way in which Opal expresses a concern with Donna's relationship with family. In the following excerpt, Opal expresses concern with the assistance her family is providing her and a possible rationale for why this is. She comments:

> I bet she is mad at you Chris [laughs]. Where are her kids? Those kids would do anything for her. Especially the youngest one. Her daughter-in-law doesn't like her though. I think she thinks Donna just needs to much all the time. Probably right.

Note the differences in the two. Dan's troubles talk points to Donna being unwilling to excessively burden her children with her troubles, even though they would gladly assist her. Here, Donna is thoughtful and considerate. However, Opal alerts us to something else. While still speaking of her children as supportive, Opal also comments on Donna's excessive demands, stating that, "her daughter-in-law doesn't like her though. I think she thinks Donna just needs to much all the time." Unlike Dan, who paints a portrait of Donna as considerate and kind, unwilling to be a burden on her children, Opal informs us of something else.

My conversations with Opal illuminate Donna's troubles and their emergence as s a source of conversation in Shady Grove. In this first example, Opal replies to comments

I made regarding Peter performing yardwork for Donna and how helpful he had been.

Staring at Donna's unit, Opal scornfully states:

> I know. He's been here for two straight weeks, doing everything around there. I don't think he ever left. He was hedging and trimming and all kinds of stuff, just whatever his momma wanted. Donna said he had to be there because they were afraid she was going to kill herself. Now, do you think they would have let her out if she was going to kill herself? She's just got to make it worse than it is, so everyone will feel sorry for her, and we're tired of it too.

Opal addresses how Donna's troubles with her family have developed into a primary concern of Shady Grovers and her support group in specific, "and we're tired of it too." This same trouble was elaborated upon by other residents. Mike commented that, "I love Donna to death, but she's going to drive her family and us crazy," and Dan, her most supportive friend, stated, "I don't know how they do it. Hell, I don't know how we do it [laughs]."

Seen in these comments, Donna's relationships with friends had become increasingly strained. At the initiation of her depression, Opal expressed concern about a sense of powerlessness that she was feeling because she was unable to help her friend. She was dumbfounded by what had happened to Donna, wondering if what she was going through was actually worth all the suffering and pain. In this excerpt from our conversation, you can hear the voice of a caring, yet frustrated friend.

> She's getting worse Chris. Ever since last week when they did that blood thing and had to go in twice. She gets real depressed. Has mood swings and is crying all the time. Calls me up like that. I don't know what to do about it. I'm not a damn doctor. I don't know how she does it though. God, all those pills she has to take. She can't go around her family 'cause of the pets, can't eat things, all that sugar free stuff. She can't do anything Chris! I don't even know if it is even worth it. I mean, look at all those pills.

However, as Donna's condition worsens, friends' views on her and her actions change. A clearly different voice emerges in Opal's commentary now. Speaking with Opal outside her unit one sunny day, she refers to Donna as "mean," "ornery," and "always complaining." Opal's comments now ring of a discontent and anger with Donna's actions.

> She gets all jealous if things go on that don't involve her. Has to have everything revolving around her. I'm tired of her shit and I'm just not going to listen to that crap anymore. Everything has to be so bad all the time. Bullshit!

But, Donna has troubles with her friends as well. Turning Opal's comments on their head, she expresses concerns, almost anger, over her relationships with neighbors, those she had previously considered to be friends. Here, she talks of friendship in The Grove and the troubles this causes. Opal figures prominently in Donna's troubles talk.

> Chris, I don't have any friends in this place. All these people here, and not a single friend. Opal, Mike, none of them. Dan's my friend, but I mean women friends. Opal is my friend, but she really isn't my friend. I told her one day that I didn't have any friends here and she looked me in the eyes and said, "No Donna, I guess you don't." How you like that? [I shake my head] That's the way I like it too. I don't want anything to do with these people anymore. I live here, I see them, and I know what they are doing. They don't think I know, but I listen.

Donna's comments alert us to the pervasiveness of the troubles talk that surrounds her. On one side, as Opal documents, an ongoing concern exists over Donna's relationship with family and friends. In contrast, Donna's ruminations point in another direction, that of a declining sense of belonging and support. Indeed, Donna now questions whether these ever existed for her. Whatever the case, their troubled concern with each other continuously produces and reproduces community in Shady Grove.

Orin, Margaret, and Troubles Talk

While Donna's troubles talk is embedded in a complex web of talk surrounding relationships with friends and family, Orin's is not so complex. His talk is located directly within a widely known relationship with his next door neighbor, Margaret. Their relationship is not a friendly one, to say the least.

Margaret is a longtime Grover. She has lived in a unit adjacent to Orin for the previous five years. Margaret's intense dislike of Orin knows no bounds and is legendary among residents. She seems to consider all her everyday troubles to be linked with Orin in some fashion. In essence, Orin is the root of all her problems.

As an example of their strange relationship, however one-sided it might be, consider the following discussion. The first occurred at a meeting that Margaret had scheduled with me through a phone call with Ms. Thompson. As she had emphatically informed me earlier in the week, the meeting was for the sole purpose of discussing Orin.

Margaret and I sat in her unit drinking tea and discussing the events of the day. I awaited her verbal assault on Orin. While talking, I noted that her television set had been opened and looked to be undergoing repair. I asked her about its condition, and Margaret began to talk of Orin. While her diatribe on the faults of Orin was lengthy, the following excerpt provides a glimpse into the way in which it unfolded:

> My TV doesn't work anymore and I know he's responsible for it. I know it. All I get is channel five and I know he's done something. He's always sneaking around doing something . . . I know it's him! Who else would be doing something like that? That damn queer, you have to watch him every minute.

Margaret's complaints, vehement as they are, do not in-and-of themselves constitute community. What does is the knowledge and talk of their relationship by Grovers and housing authority staff alike. It is their active talk of Margaret and Orin's troubles that works to form community in the Grove. Indeed, Margaret's troubles are their troubles.

Housing authority staff is surprisingly knowledgeable of Margaret's obsession with Orin. Their relationship often emerged as a topic of conversation, whether it was with office workers, management, or maintenance. All seemed to be in the know. When I would mention my conversations with Margaret, they would roll their eyes and laugh. Some comments by John are quite telling of this. Drawing on an experientially based knowledge of Orin and Margaret's conflict, John explains her relationship with Orin by linking it with a recent incident Margaret had with staff.

> Bitch! Don't like nobody. Hates Orin, "that bird thinks he's so hot. Thinks he's the shit. Always sneaking around" [Elaborates]. Got on Cathy's ass one time when her and I were doing an inspection or something. Margaret, that old bitch, said something about Orin, and Cathy rolled her eyes and boy, did Margaret light into her. Snotty old woman. Ain't nobody around here like her much.

While John espouses staff knowledge, Grovers display an even greater, intimate knowledge of their troubles. Their comments are quite bemusing and perhaps inquisitive as to why Margaret detests Orin. In a chance meeting, Olga, a former neighbor of the two who now lives directly behind Mike, commented on their relationship and its curious nature, "Margaret just detests Orin. I'm not really sure why. He's always nice to me."

Mae echoes these feelings in troubles talk of her own. Note in Mae's comments her thoughts that though Orin's behavior is certainly problematic at times, it is Margaret's

behavior that is the actual trouble. Her comments are telling of resident's knowledge and thoughts of Margaret and her troubles. She states that, "I don't have anything against Orin. He's a bit of a busy body I guess, but that Margaret women really hates him. I hear her always complaining about him to Donna and people."

Conclusion

Community is not so easily located. Not in Shady Grove. Not in any locale. So how does it come to be a recognizable entity? In talk, community may emerge through anchors that unite and give life to it, providing a footing from which it can flourish. We hear these anchors over and over again as we listen and engage in conversation.

In Shady Grove, celebrity forms an anchor that drives its community. Orin and Donna, the celebrities of The Grove, anchor a troubles talk of multiple purposes. Their troubles talk produces a biography of Shady Grove, constructing both its past and future. Talk forms who they are, or at least whom the residents see them as. By constructing Donna and Orin, Grovers establish who they are and most importantly, who they are not. Donna and Orin's behaviors, and subsequent identities, serve as the negative standard by which Grovers can measure and evaluate themselves and their neighbors.

Their celebrity is embedded in the relationships they hold. Orin's longstanding difficulties with Margaret serve as narrative fodder for residents as they gossip about Margaret's actions and obsession with Orin. Indeed, knowledge of Margaret's behavior extends beyond the physical walls of Shady Grove to the housing authority. Donna's declining health, both physical and mental, embeds itself in troubles talk and gives life to community through the ongoing tale of her decline and the troubles it has caused.

The celebrity of Orin and Donna is the glue, if you will, that holds the community of Shady Grove together, even as it seemingly tears it apart. Spats between neighbors, even hatred, talk of family and neglect, and of caring and astonishment, are all accomplished through the use of celebrity. Without celebrity there might not be community in The Grove. Certainly not the one that I recognized. Talk of the troubles of and troubles with Donna and Orin are what makes community expand and flourish in the neighborhood. Donna and Orin, and the troubles talk that surrounds and constructs them, make community a possibility.

CHAPTER 6
MAINTENANCE WORKERS, PUBLIC POLICING, AND TROUBLES TALK

Shady Grove provides a unique empirical site where the existence of a local culture with its own social conflicts, encounters with outside entities, and identity group politics can be seen. Though culturally marginalized as elderly, the residents do not engage in narratives of resistance or ongoing reproductions of ideological conflicts as in some highly political communities. Nonetheless, there is conflict which is specific to and embedded in the particular relations Shady Grovers have with their principal, external structural linkage with the local housing office. This chapter centers on the ways that this connection enters into the formation of community. The first section deals with Grovers as a collective in the face of a common adversary and the second focuses on group identity and boundary maintenance.

A Contested Adversary and Collective Construction

As Robert DeNiro's character in the film "Wag the Dog," Conrad Brady comments, "we could have a war without an enemy. It'd be a dull war," an enemy or adversary can go a long way in consolidating a collection of individuals. Shady Grove is no exception. Its relations with the housing authority, especially its most visible and ever-present maintenance workers, are a source of continual troubles talk among residents. Since almost all residents mail in their rent money, they have infrequent contact with the

housing authority per se. Contact is made most often when maintenance assistance is needed. It is rarely with Ms. Thompson, the director, herself.

Maintenance responds to complaints reported to Thompson's clerical staff. The staff take the maintenance complaints and "log them," contact the maintenance workers, who are all men, and inform them that assistance is needed in Shady Grove. As one might imagine, the public housing units often have structural problems that need attention, and it seems that the elderly in residence are eager to point these out.

Indeed, the related troubles talk that leads to a complaint by one resident, upon being heard by another resident, is likely to prompt the latter to look into the need to file her own similar complaint. There are frequent and often time-consuming contacts between residents and maintenance staff. In addition to "maintenance calls," as the housing authority refers to them, the maintenance staff also performs routine upkeep and some yard work. Because of their enduring presence in the area, the men are well known by the residents, and most often referred to by first name. Needless to say, their presence, like visible and celebrated residents, mark an important and continuing dividing line between "them" and "us."

Of course, a few residents are pleased with the upkeep and overall condition of their units and Shady Grove as a whole, but, as the saying goes, their related comments are "few and far between." These residents do not have overt concerns with the work of the maintenance men and in most instances have high praise for the workers' efforts in the neighborhood. Few in number, the group views others who are "anti-maintenance," as I once heard them referred to, as their worthy adversary. Overwhelmingly though, Shady

Grovers have little respect for the workers as a whole and the work they perform in particular. There is an almost constant stream of talk about the performance of the maintenance men, although not all of it becomes complaints called into the housing authority. Most is limited to a shared annoyance.

The residents see the maintenance men, who for all practical purposes are the housing authority, as adversaries. That occurs because they want a particular look, or level of upkeep, for the neighborhood. As one tenant put it, "I just want this place to feel like home. How is that supposed to happen' when [the maintenance men] keep screwing things up." According to a large group of Shady Grovers, the housing authority is unable to provide the necessary look to the complex or the requested upkeep to the units. The residents see themselves as an embattled group in this regard and in a struggle to obtain adequate maintenance services.

The Anti-maintenance Group

In The Functions of Social Conflict, Lewis Coser (1956) is concerned with the role that external conflict and discrepancies between groups in the development of solidarity. His interest in conflict as a group-binding action is pertinent to Shady Grove. Coser writes that according to Marx, "classes constitute themselves only through conflict. Individuals may have objective common positions in society, but they become aware of the community of their interests only in and through conflict" (1956:35).

For a group to act, the group must first see itself as both a group and as "negatively privileged." That is, the group, as Coser notes, "must come to believe that it is being denied rights to which it is entitled. It must reject any justification for the existing

distribution of rights and privileges" (1956:37). In short, for a group to exist it must first

note discrepancies between existent expectancies and performance. Shady Grove is not

immune to this.

On a small scale, the dynamics of this process is in operation in Shady Grove. To

illustrate, consider the following talk and interaction that unfolded one afternoon in

Donna's front yard. Donna, Dan, and I were talking about daily life in the Grove, when a

maintenance man named Tom suddenly walked by. He was very polite and said hello to

each of us by name. After Tom had left, Donna began speaking of an occurrence two

days earlier in which she had spoken with Tom about the state of her sidewalks and how

dirty they were. The conversation developed from there.

Donna:	[Referring to Tom] He says, "That's the job for the yard man." He's being disrespectful, ya know, and I tell him [that] I know, but I need to clean my sidewalks, I can't have them getting dirty.
Dan:	You can't depend on the yard guy. He comes every now and then and then doesn't do a good job. I don't care about that, though. These maintenance men should be doing the yards anyhow. Geez, they get paid enough. You'd think they could do a little work around here for all us old folk [laughs].
Donna:	I know. I just want to bleach my sidewalks. You'd think they could do it, right?
Chris:	Why don't I tell John over at the Housing Authority and he'll get them to do it, okay?
Dan:	I won't make any difference. They won't do it right and neither will the yard man. They'll just screw it up.

Dan echoes a common group sentiment here when he states, "you'd think they

could do a little work around here for all us old folk." He confirms this with, "they won't

do it right and neither will the yard man. They'll just screw it up." With this, Dan names

Donna's personal trouble with her sidewalks as really an ongoing problem of the

neighborhood as a whole, the overall source of its troubles being that the inability of the

maintenance men and the housing authority to perform their tasks to the standards they should be held up to.

This isn't a momentary expression of arrogance and subject of troubles talk. Donna continues to complain about the cleanliness of her sidewalks all week. As many neighbors noted, Donna became quite obsessed with the cleanliness of her surroundings, explaining that, since her heart transplant, she had, in fact, gone "over the edge." Donna tells me that, "if Cathy [office staff] doesn't do something, I'm going to call Ms. Thompson." Using past events to establish a contrast between prior performance and present maintenance actions, Donna suggests that this has been a recurring trend in maintenance work in Shady Grove, not an isolated incident. Indeed, as Donna notes below, it affects all residents.

> He fixed my screen door one time and all he could say was, "there, that's the best we can do." Now, what kind of thing is that to say? Do you think he goes around this whole place telling everyone this? Doing a half-ass job and saying, "there, that's the best we can do."

Residents routinely place their complaints in a local, historical context. True or not, past relations with maintenance workers are constructed to enhance the negativeness of present ones. Diane illustrates this as she discusses the work of maintenance man Ted. Ted's efforts are portrayed as hurting Shady Grovers as a whole and that, as a group, many residents are upset with his efforts. Diane explains:

> Ted used to not be so bad, you know. He used to do a great job, especially with the really old ones out here. But now, he's just fallen apart. He went to some other complex, and he comes back here and just does some half-ass job. Must be getting ready to retire [laughs]. Sometimes I talk with Donna and Mike and all them, and we all see it the same way. He just isn't as good as he used to be. Dan says that he doesn't even say hi sometimes. There's no reason for that.

Diane, talking about Eric, provides us with another illustration. Here, she isn't as general about her concern, referring to the poor work done on her screen door.

> He doesn't know what he's doing Chris. He shouldn't be doing this kind of work [pointing to her screen door]. A job that needs to be done once, it takes them four times, and Eric has to have Ted do it. You know, I've lived in two other places, Rocky Village and Town Village, and both of them had better maintenance men than we do. They say they give us the best work and attention out here, but they're lying, and they know it. I don't want them touching anything of mine again. I'll just call my sons to do it.

Donna's talk centers on Rufus, another of the maintenance men assigned to Shady Grove. She uses Rufus to illustrate both the failures of the maintenance men in performing their tasks and the failures of the housing authority as a whole. The following conversation between Donna and me provides a useful example. It takes place in the context of Dan's attempt to replace his old carpet with the carpet from Margaret Williams' unit. The carpet was available since Margaret was going to live with her daughter, who had recently given birth to a son. Our conversation began with Donna responding to a question concerning the status of Dan's carpet replacement project, and developed into a discussion of Rufus and housing authority failures.

Donna:	Yeah, they got in. Rufus and them came over and moved it from Margaret's unit to [Dan's]. But it don't fit though. Rufus always screws up somehow.
Chris:	What do you mean? Weren't his and Margaret's unit the same size? I thought that was the whole point in getting the carpet.
Donna:	Chris, the units are warped. That's why they sag in places. You could put a TV up or something and it would be leaning to one side. Not one unit is the same, I don't care what [the Housing Authority] says. They're just cheap [said with hands on hips]
Chris:	You know the bidding process, Donna. The Housing Authority has to take the cheapest one, so a lot of times they screw it up.
Donna:	I don't care. I know that but I also know these places are cheap and they shouldn't be that way.

The Pro-maintenance Group

If most Shady Grovers are quite open in stating their displeasure with the maintenance men, there remain a staunch few who support and applaud them. Though much smaller in number, they are vehement in their positive opinion of the maintenance crew and their efforts in the neighborhood. In contrast to the framing of the anti-maintenance group, this group sees the maintenance men as supportive, friendly, and helpful.

As an example, listen to Mike as she and Donna discuss the performance of Terry. Terry had recently completed work for Mike on an appliance in her unit. The conversation develops in relation to this.

Mike:	He was a good worker.
Donna:	Uh uh. No he wasn't.
Mike:	Fixed that toilet back there. The thing was wobbling all over and he got it straight. Been that way ever since.
Donna:	I don't think he's that good. Rude too, hardly ever speaks.
Mike:	He fixed my refrigerator too. I bet he's just good with appliances
Donna:	Maybe he's just good with certain things..

Since the anti-maintenance group is the outspoken majority in The Grove, other residents who favor the workers are often placed in a defensive position, pressured to explain their stance and to provide evidence to substantiate their claims. Donna's and Mike's talk is an example. From her opening statement regarding the quality of Terry's work, Mike works diligently to provide contradictory evidence to Donna's claim that Terry is not, in reality, a good worker. According to Mike, Terry had fixed her toilet well and, "got it straight." In addition, he had also repaired her refrigerator. Moving along, Donna gives in, if begrudgingly, allowing that Terry might be, "good with certain things."

However, she does not agree with Mike that Terry is, as Mike argues, a skilled worker.
Mike refuses to relinquish her position. Donna again acquiesces, saying that Mike's claim
might be valid, but is very narrow in scope and applies to appliances only.

In the ongoing battle over maintenance competence in Shady Grove, Mike, Mae,
and Audra form the core group that support the maintenance men. Sitting in Mae's living
room, an extended and sometimes animated conversation developed between the three
that links together both the competent work of the maintenance men and the troubles that
this group was having with those they label as "complainers."

Mae:	Did you hear Opal the other day, talking about how the men out here don't fix things right, Mike?
Mike:	Yes I did. I know that Terry and Rick do a good job on my place. They sure fixed my toilet. It was wobbling all over the place, ya know.
Chris:	Why do you think people out here complain about the maintenance men so much?
Audra:	Probably don't have anything else to do [laughs]. They sit inside their units just thinking about it all day. Don't know why Dan complains though. He gets out and about and ought to know hard they work.
Mae:	Dan used to paint and all for Ms. Thompson, so maybe he knows something we don't. They do a good job as far as I can tell though, so that's good enough for me.

Boundary Work as Public Policing

If complaints about the maintenance men are an external source of shared identity,
there also are indigenous sources which stem from efforts of Shady Grovers to police their
own collective. The dynamics here are informed by Joshua Gamson's (1997) views of
collective identity.

Scholars now routinely note that social movements depend on the active ongoing
construction of collective identity, and that deciding who we are requires deciding
who we are not (Phelan 1993; Taylor and Whittier 1992). All social movements,

and identity movements in particular, are thus in the business, at least sometimes, of exclusion. (P. 179; emphasis in original)

Gamson explains that the ongoing construction and maintenance of group boundaries not only involves disputes with outside groups, or those that are not members of the collectivity in question, but with those within the collectivity, "the us is solidified not just against an external them, but also against them inside" (1997:180; emphasis in original).

Cathy Cohen (1996) suggests that to understand identity groups, "we must first understand . . . how group members define and redefine themselves, setting their own standards for 'full group membership'" (p. 363). Cohen argues that it is necessary to confront and embrace the indigenous formulations through which boundaries are articulated and enforced. These definitions of the dominant and necessary qualifications to be considered a "true" member of a particular identity group are closely monitored, guarded, and evaluated by group members themselves.

> Individuals employ a certain "calculus" of indigenous membership which can include an assessment of personal or moral worth, such as an individual's contribution to the community, their adherence to community norms and values, or their faithfulness to perceived, rewritten, or in some cases newly created [group] traditions. (1996:363)

By enforcing closely guarded collective boundaries and related enforceable definitions against others, or the "outside world," groups employ a process of public policing, where agendas, moral judgments, and evaluations are publicly communicated to a collective constituency. This allocates full group membership to some, marginalizing others in the process. Boundaries are enforced indigenously, providing specific transcripts of what a legitimate, non-marginalized member must be.

Gamson (1997) and Cohen (1996) provide us with empirical examples of indigenous policing at work. Gamson's work focuses on the exclusionary practices at a feminist music festival. At the 19th Annual Michigan Womyn's [sic] Music Festival (MWMF), a noticeable problem emerged that pertained to the inclusion of transgendered persons in the MWMF. A tightly guarded event, the MWMF has very specific rules about who can enter the festival grounds. At the time of the disagreement, policies were in place that limited attendance to only, "womyn-born womyn." Even though prominent activists, including Leslie Feinberg, joined the protest, no changes were made to the formal rules of the festival. However, transgendered individuals were allowed to enter the festival "without resistance."

The case of the MWMF points to the relationship between the policing of symbolic boundaries and a wider, cultural collective.. A dispute common to all collective identity groups, these battles, and sometimes forced expulsions or inclusions, are ordinary and as Gamson states, "nothing new."

Cohen's (1996) work centers around the identity politics of black gay men and AIDS. Articulating her concerns, she asks:

> Will certain groups members [of the black community] be rejected by other marginal group members because of their inability to meet indigenous standards of "blackness?" Are there processes through which the full "rights" or empowerment of group members becomes negated or severely limited within black communities because of stigmatized black identity? (P. 364)

Cohen wishes to know how the black community, as an indigenous group, responded was to the AIDS epidemic in the United States. She focuses on the indigenous

contestations over black male gay identity and the manner in which these have directly impacted the black community's construction and response to AIDS.

According to Cohen, the response of the black community to the AIDS epidemic has been fearfully weak given the gravity of the situation. AIDS is now the "top" killer of black men between the ages of 25 and 44 along with black women ages 18-44. In addition, 114, 868 blacks in America have been diagnosed with AIDS. Why has the response been so inadequate in the face of a killer? She documents that while the gay community has mounted a vast and coordinated effort through collective action, "there has been no substantial and sustained mobilization around this crisis in African-American communities" (Cohen 1996:373).

This is due, she suggests, to black gay men not adhering to specific religious parameters of sexuality long established in the black community. Black gay men are not doing the work of producing "little black warriors," as the community demands that its men do. Instead, homosexual, black men serve whites through their "gayness."

> The rules continue suggesting that to be gay is to be a pawn of a white genocidal plot, intent on destroying the black community. To be gay is to want to be white anyway, since we all know that there is no tradition of homosexuality in our African history. Thus, to be gay is [to] stand outside the norms, values, and practices of the community, putting your "true" blackness into question. (Cohen 1996:379)

Because of these views, the black community has actively policed black gay men, forcing them into the fringes of the community. Due to the connection between their sexual activities and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, they are seen as a liability to political and economic agendas. In addition, gay, black men are considered by many as immoral, damaging and embarrassing to the ongoing existence of the black community.

Public Policing in Shady Grove

Shady Grove is not immune to similar actions. Residents publicly police other Grovers in order to demarcate boundaries. They have a clear idea what it is to be a true Grover, and their reasoning centers around acceptable levels of sociability, race, and cleanliness.

Sociability

Shady Grove is a very sociable place where residents talk and converse in great length. An important facet of this talk if the marking of, "who's in and who's out," so to speak. Listen as Audra and I talk. Audra speaks to a neighborhood lacking an acceptable level of interaction. The conversation goes like this:

Chris:	Audra, how do you like living back there in your apartment?
Audra:	Oh, I like it alright. Some people so isolated here. I don't know how they go about makin' it.
Chris:	Do you like your neighbors? You know, the ones in the same unit, I guess?
Audra:	They're alright. Some ain't so neighborly though. I mean they'll speak to you, but that's about it. Just don't talk much. I mean, I like to socialize and get out, and they just talk to you and say, "hey," and such. We're all elderly here. You'd think we'd get together or something.
Chris:	Be like a community, not just a neighborhood?
Audra:	That's it exactly. Stop being so isolated and do a little carrying on [laughs]. We got so much in common, we really should do more together.

Consider how she speaks of the "cooped up women" discussed earlier in the dissertation. According to Audra, the women are not sociable, "all holed up back there in their units." She expresses the same concern to me on another occasion, telling me, "Chris, sometimes I don't know. Some of these women 'round here, they never get out anywhere."

This is a serious matter to Audra. She often spoke of it. Returning to the neighborhood one day after helping Audra with some financial affairs at a local bank, she noted that Grovers "not neighborly." The reason for this, according to Audra, is that many of the residents own automobiles. They don't need each other. She notes that Grovers,

> have cars and such. I mean I have one too, but, you know, it keeps gettin' worked on. I ask them and they just want help out. Got their own errands to run and such. I understand that, but oh well, you here now. I can't understand though. It's just not neighborly.

While Audra searches for a Shady Grove, that will, "do a little carryin' on," and would, "get together or something," other residents wish for a quieter and calmer neighborhood. The complex is too sociable and the residents too talkative.

A primary part of this type of talk in The Grove is gossip. When Margaret and I talked, she would often become agitated and angry about the excessive talk, or gossip, in the neighborhood. In an earlier conversation, Margaret alerts us to this trouble. Concerned with her arch-nemesis, Orin, she talks of how, "he's always spreading rumors about you or anybody else, talking in his slick way," and that, "he tells everyone whatever he hears."

While trouble and "too much talk" is inextricably linked to Orin by Margaret, other residents have similar concerns about the culture of Shady Grove in general. The concern is with residents that are explicitly labeled as gossipers. This group, and their talk, represents a threat to Shady Grove itself, as well as to individual residents. One particular event stands out. Late one evening, I sat with Mike, sharing a glass of sweet tea, when Donna and Opal barged into the unit, obviously upset, and demanded that Mike sign a

petition that they had just written. The petition complained about the number of residents in violation of housing authority regulations. The most notable of these violations were those pertaining to pet ownership. However, Mike refused to sign the petition. On hearing her decision, Opal and Donna turned and stormed out of the apartment. Soon after they had left, Mike stood and began pacing. As she walked, she cried out that,

> I'm not gonna sign that thing. They don't understand, they are going to get this whole place worked up. The housing authority has enough problems without having to deal with all that would cause with all these women out here. Whoo!

This does not tell the whole story. Mike has larger concerns that link Donna's recent heart problems and depression with her current actions. For Mike, the reason for Donna's strange behavior is her recent poor health. In her talk, Mike locates a concern with gossip and personal harm.

> I hope [Donna's] okay. She used to be real jolly and everything, I remember it. She's just not right now. But I'm not going to get involved in any gossip. I hate gossip. That's why I live down here. You know, it gets to me, and these women around here, they come after me, and I'm just an innocent bystander.

While Margaret is often disgruntled with Orin, others express similar concerns with her. Though many residents have trouble with Margaret, Donna's thoughts are perhaps the most eloquent. Standing in the parking area between the two front units laying on the larger cul-de-sac, Donna, Mike, and I were discussing Margaret's recent behavior around The Grove. I shared with the two of them that I had recently been in Margaret's unit and had a long conversation with her. Donna, in a rather nasty voice, stated:

> Something's wrong with her is the problem. She's always going somewhere and saying something. When I moved in here, the first thing she did was come up to me and start telling me the scoop on everybody out here. How bad they were.

Chris, I didn't even know these people yet. Hadn't even met them. But buddy, let me tell you, she knew it and she was going to let me know it too.

Maintaining boundaries in Shady Grove is not just gossiping, or the troubles with gossiping. Meta-gossiping, or gossiping about gossiping, serves a similar purpose. Consider this conversation between Donna, Diane, Mike and me. Our concern is with Olga, who had recently left us to telephone her daughter. The conversation proceeds as follows:

Diane:	That old lady don't like me.
Donna:	Her? Don't pay no mind to her. She's just a little strange.
Diane:	I can tell she don't like me though, look at her scurrying off like that. I'm just the way I am and some people don't like that. But I've always been this way and I ain't gonna change now. That's just the way it is. But some people like to talk and say things about me. I don't pay 'em no mind though.
Donna:	Oh yeah, some of these women talk. Even more than us [laughs]. Some bad, some good. If something happens here it is the talk of the town. It gets a little crazy sometimes. These crazy women all talking.
Chris:	Oh yeah, I've always wanted to be the talk of the town [group laughs].
Mike:	Don't pay no attention to them. I try to stay out of this. That's why I have that corner apartment. But Larue, she use to live right there [points to apartment across parking lot], and we would just sit there and talk and talk. She knew what was going on [laughs]. She would talk about everyone. If you wanted to know, just ask Larue. She was awful.

What begins as a conversation centering around Olga's dislike of Mike, soon changes into a troubles talk of meta-gossip. Donna tells us that some of these women talk," but then describes herself, Diane, and Mike, as residents who also "talk." Mike alerts us to the lower status of gossipers, stating that she, "don't pay no attention to them." She continues by alluding to a former resident, a close friend, who often talked of

other residents and their troubles. Jokingly, Mike concludes by telling the group that those who gossip do not conform to the normative behavior of Shady Grovers.

"The Black Problem"

In Shady Grove, race plays an important role in policing and community construction. In short, who belongs and who doesn't is influenced by racial prejudice. This is underscored in what Dan refers to as "the black problem." During my fieldwork, there were six black residents in Shady Grove. Four of these were women. When referring to "the black problem," as Dan calls it, he alludes to the behavior of the black female residents in the neighborhood.

I first heard of the black problem when Dan asked me one morning, "Chris, you heard about the black problem out here?" I said that I had not and he continued, telling me that "strange things had been going on in the complex." Using his neighbor, Pearlie, as an example, Dan tells me that, "she comes in around two in the morning and gets her paper. I'm usually awake and I hear her." She is rarely there, he explains, and when there behaves in what he terms a "mysterious fashion."

Pearlie and her meanderings certainly do not constitute a problem, however. The trouble extends beyond Pearlie. Other residents also display strange behavior. For example, consider Dan's complaints of another black resident's behavior:

> She used to be out on her porch all the time, talking with the other Blacks. Draw her blinds up first thing in the morning. Now, she's never out there and keeps her blinds shut tight. Black as night in there. She never comes out anymore. I asked Donna if she knew anything and she doesn't either. Something strange is going one though. I don't know, I guess everybody got their troubles and I shouldn't worry about it, but is it a coincidence all this is going on at the same time [places hands in an "I don't know" position]?

He continued this same line of conversation another day. While discussing his recent participation in Tai Chi classes to improve a rapidly deteriorating sense of balance, something that he found great humor in, Dan began to talk about the black problem. Since his original comments on the problem, we had spoken three more times. Each time Dan expressed concerns about the observed problem. Here, he speaks specifically to a recent incident between Donna and Audra. Because of the incident, Dan feels that he needs to patrol the neighborhood at night, insuring the safety of other Grovers. Since the problem originated with Audra, a black woman, it is part of the black problem. The conversation surrounding the incident continues with Dan shifting from his talk of Audra to troubles he is having with Pearlie, linking the two women together.

> Pearlie is trying to get her daughter to move down here. Down from North Carolina. Now why do you think that is? The benefits are better here, you know? You would think her daughters are going to winter in Florida [laughing].

Dan's conceptualization of the black problem becomes part of the accepted discourse of Shady Grove in regards to African-American residents in the complex. They are seen as a major problem that somehow contributes to a lower quality of life. Listen to Donna, using Dan's own words, as she describes the episode with Audra. In doing so, she links a particular happening with a wider problem. Donna's comments emerge out of a discussion of some driving assistance I had provided Audra.

Donna:	Chris, she doesn't need to be going anywhere. She's got relatives all over this town that will take her places. I'm going to call the Housing Authority on her though. Last night she has me call the police for her. She's afraid of something. It's that damn "black problem" that Dan is always talking about.
Chris:	Why did you call the police?
Donna:	Said there was someone knocking at her door. It was

> about nine o'clock. I could hear the knocking too, but there's always people knocking on her doors. She may as well keep them open, people coming and going all hours of the night. I'm telling you, these Blacks out here are all up to something. Dan says the KKK is after Pearlie [laughs].

Here, Donna's trouble with Audra is inextricably linked with a wider neighborhood problem. Audra's actions are representative of the recent behavior of black women as a whole. Dan's troubles talk works constructs the women as not "worthy" of their residence in The Grove, thus separating them from those that deserve to be there.

Cleanliness

The importance of personal hygiene and unit upkeep came to my attention one day during a discussion with Donna over lunch. A formally homeless man, Mr. Reid, had moved into the unit adjacent to Donna's the day before. He is a very nice and amiable man with whom I often talked with on my daily journeys through the neighborhood. He is unable to perform many daily, common tasks due to a disability. Therefore, I often ran errands for him. I purchased fish for him, bought groceries, and purchased snuff, which he used profusely.

When he moved into the neighborhood, a few of the residents lent a helping hand. Orin was perhaps the most helpful in this regard, assisting Mr. Reid with cooking, and the moving of various furniture items delivered to Mr. Reid from a local homeless shelter.

Concerns arose in regards to Mr. Reid though. Does Mr. Reid belong in Shady Grove? Is he what a resident should be? This was a much contested question. While some, such as Orin, expressed to me the necessity of providing Mr. Reid housing and how they saw it as their duty to help him, others expressed very different sentiments. Listen as

Donna articulates her own reservations about Mr. Reid. Her troubles with him are attached to her own longstanding difficulties with Orin.

> I told Orin, I don't care if he's new or homeless or what . . . you don't need to be doing everything for him. Orin was making something out of a stop sign to put on his front porch. Where in the hell is he going to put it? That man has had cardboard boxes on his front porch since he moved in . . . Orin didn't like that. He walked off in a huff or something, saying that at least some people care. I care too Chris, but the man has to take care of himself. He can see and can walk. He's just a dirty, disgusting old man with that snuff and everything.

Other residents voice similar concerns with Mr. Reid. Opal states, "that old man is just plain old dirty. I see him in there, just sitting there, spitting his snuff and watching TV." Margaret makes a similar argument, telling me that, "Chris, I don't think he really should be here. Have you been in his kitchen? It's nasty. I don't know why he's here." There is a question of whether Mr. Reid <u>deserves</u> to be a Shady Grover. Grovers see their inclusion as an earned status. To achieve this, cleanliness is certainly a necessary virtue.

Concerns over cleanliness are not limited to Mr. Reid. In an excerpt discussed in the section on social types, there is a concern over Mae's cat and how it, "pooped everywhere." Mae should wash off her front porch every morning because the, "cat shits on [it] every night." Opal is particularly concerned with this since Mae is a next-door neighbor. Her own concerns are echoed by various other Grovers.

Resident Frances is rarely seen in Shady Grove. Nevertheless, she maintains a strong friendship with Donna, Diane, and "the gang," as the women sometimes call themselves. Frances' cleanliness is also a matter of neighborhood concern. Her unit is infamous among Grovers. Listen as John, the maintenance director talks of Frances. According to John, Frances is simply a,

fuckin' pack rat. Nothin' but a damn pack rat. Got boxes stacked to the ceiling . . . She's been doing that same for six years. As long as I've been here. Nice lady, I guess, but shit, can you throw a damn box away woman?

Frances' behavior was the butt of many jokes among residents. Donna once told me that, "if you ever leave anything out here Chris, especially a box [laughs], then you know where to look." Certainly funny, her actions also make visible what some residents see as the underlying problem of her behavior— a poor mental state. Sadly enough, this also served as fodder for jokes and sarcasm. Opal's thoughts on this matter are telling. Listen as she sarcastically comments, "you'd think she'd be crazier than she is already. Hell, wouldn't you if you couldn't find your way around in your own house?"

Conclusion

As social movement and identity politics have occupied center stage in debates over cultural ideologies and the overarching scripts of social life, localized identity as the site of policing has been neglected. When the local has been the subject of analysis, it is most often seen as a site where wider discursive forces are reproduced. Unfortunately, this strips away, or disregards, local contingencies that play into its production.

The behavior of the Grovers points us towards the possibly that local cultures may indeed have social movements and identity politics that are devoid of macro-narratives. Instead, the identities are bound up within the walls of the local culture, such as that of Shady Grove. In the ongoing production of boundaries-in-the-making among Shady Grovers, of the policing of these boundaries, and in the residents' particular troubles talk of resistance towards the housing authority, we see the inherent production of identity, boundaries, and resistance peculiar to a local site. Community is ongoingly produced as

the residents listen to the troubles, separate themselves based on these troubles, and continually attend to the behaviors of others.

CHAPTER 7
ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK, TROUBLES TALK, AND COMMUNITY
FORMATION

In their book Conversations at Random (1974), Jean Converse and Howard

Schuman consider the manner in which interviewers view the interview process. Their

discussion is based on 150 graduate students' responses to the interview process. All of

the interviewers were trained in the techniques of survey research through the University

of Michigan's Detroit Area Study. Converse and Schuman alert us to, "how interpretively

engaging, and relatedly difficult and exasperating, the survey respondent can be" (Holstein

and Gubrium 1995:10). The authors provide an "unwitting juxtaposition" between the

active respondent and the vessel-of-answers position needed to perform survey research.

However, while considering and even acknowledging the subjective nature of the survey

research process, they still set it aside in pursuit of the objective, "we make no apologies

for the subjective nature of this material--it is the raison d'etre of this book--but we

emphasize that it is not intended to stand in opposition to more objective research"

(Converse and Schuman 1974:p. vii; as cited in Holstein & Gubrium 1995:10).

Interestingly, the authors are presented with responses of the "young researchers"

that openly suggest the deeply subjective nature of survey interviewing. One respondent

tells us that the subject of the interview process may be significantly different from what it

is assumed to be.

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One begins to wonder--could it be that these alternative conceptualizations of reality [offered by the respondent] may have some grain of truth? Could it be that those values, different from mine, may be as legitimate as mine? Sitting in the university, one can see the limitations inherent in the social locations of other people and their perceptions of social reality. But one wonders, too, if the perceptions of the objective social scientists are not bounded by their own, but similar, limitations. (Converse and Schuman 1974:8; as cited in Holstein and Gubrium 1995:11)

Converse and Schuman, however, choose not to take the "inexperienced" researcher seriously, viewing his position, and wonderment of the social world, to a lack of time in the field. In so doing, the authors further alert us to the argument that though the subjective respondent is considered, if only briefly, the role of the interviewer is to still "effectively access the vessel of answers behind the respondent" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:11). The interviewer is to control him or herself in order not to interfere with the passive respondent.

Qualitative Methods and Ethnographic Fieldwork

Qualitative research, on the other hand, revels in an immersion into lived experience. Deeply embedded in what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) refer to as, "an experiential labyrinth" (p. 49), the researcher finds him or herself embroiled in the nitty-gritty of life and its myriad details. Borrowing from the work of Dorothy Smith (1987), these authors suggest that the general point of the "active interview" is to engage respondents in meaningful talk embedded in lived experience: "The respondent becomes a kind of researcher in his or her own right, consulting repertoires of experience and orientations, linking fragments into patterns, accounts, and explanations" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:29).

Of all qualitative approaches, it is ethnographic fieldwork that most deeply immerses the researcher in the subjectively experienced social world and everyday life. As an approach, field research pays analytic homage to everyday actions and, "demands appreciation of [member's] distinctive concerns, forms of life, and ways of behaving in their particular social world" (Emerson 1983:14). Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) tell us that the goals of field research are,

> getting closer to the people involved in it, seeing it in a variety of situations they meet, noting their problems and observing how they handle them, being party to their conversations and watching their way of life as it flows along. (Blumer 1986:37; as cited in Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:5)

Through its analytic attention to the myriad details of social life and the visible interactions that subjectively construct this, ethnographic fieldwork works to engage members in ongoing knowledge-in-the-making. Fieldwork "[aims] to render obscure matters intelligible by providing them with an informing context" (Geertz 1983:152; as cited in Gubrium 1988:74). Fieldwork orients to both the commonplace and the extraordinary in situ (Emerson 1983).

In working in the field, the ethnographer must necessarily become deeply involved in the social particularities of the site under study. All field relations are social relations (Emerson 1983). The fieldworker must work to become part, to some degree, of the culture being observed. As Melvin Pollner and Robert Emerson (1983:235) observe, "practically, the fieldworker wants both to get close to those studies--to become immersed in their daily rounds of life--and to move freely among them." To observe subjects in the field is to engage in a continuously accomplished, negotiated, arrangement between

observer and observed that provides freedom to a fieldworker in pursuing research aims. Talking of this, and the peculiarities of it, Van Maanen remarks, "the work routines of a field-worker . . . are rather unnatural or at least unusual ones in most settings--hanging around, snooping, engaging in seemingly idle chitchat, not taking, asking odd (often dumb) questions, pushing for disclosures" (1991:32).

Involved in what Geertz (1983) refers to as the "microscopic nature of ethnography," the field researcher must make all efforts to get "inside" the local culture under study to see lived interaction and hear talk. In so doing, the fieldworker must get close and inevitably become present during social interaction (Pollner and Emerson 1983). As Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (1994) observe, "qualitative research is fundamentally naturalistic in essence; it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction" (p. 379). In getting to social life in situ, the researcher necessarily accomplishes a negotiated arrangement between observer and observed, allowing the fieldworker to engage the actors in intimate and sensitive areas of personal relationships. The researcher must not only get close to the social interaction of members, the researcher must become intimate with it.

The Emergence of Community in Shady Grove

Unlike the growing number of organizational studies where the fieldworker is provided a "space" to observe, my fieldwork in Shady Grove did not allow for such a distant removal. Residents' troubles talk appeared in conversations at dinner tables, in parking lots, sitting on front porches, and in cars. I would make quick excuses to leave a conversation, running to my car to hastily scribble field notes, or shut myself in the

bathroom, writing quickly in the small notebook that I carried. The resident were quite aware that I was at Shady Grove as a researcher and often joked about it in conversation. In fact, they seemed to be quite proud that I was even interested in them. Using their interest in me as a catalyst for social interaction, I was actively involved in encouraging, through our conversations, the very community I was to write about. This level of active involvement contrasts with what we have come to know of fieldworkers as they are commonly represented in standard qualitative research books and articles. Expressing the common sentiment, Adler and Adler (1994) observe, "one of the hallmarks of observation has traditionally been its non-interventionism. Observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects. They do not ask subjects research questions, pose tasks for them, or deliberately create new provocations" (p. 378).

However, a question needs to be asked. Do ethnographers, by their sheer presence in the field, invariably contribute to the natural existence of the very phenomenon being investigated? This is not a question embroiled in postmodern constructionist arguments concerning the "poetics of representation" or the constitutive writing practices of the ethnographer, but rather the mundane practices of field researchers and their role in the promotion of the visibility of the social activity under consideration.

For example, does community, to the degree that I document here, still exist in Shady Grove? I am no longer actively pursuing data in the field when I return to visit residents, and the questions that I often asked to prompt residents' troubles talk no longer occur. I suggest that, if, indeed, my presence there worked to embrace and encourage the conversational practices of troubles talk, through which I argue community is formed,

then the empirical evidence of community in my absence would not be as recognizable or observable as it was when I spent time among the Grovers. Did I serve as a "lightning rod" through which community blossomed and expanded?

Maybe this will help answer the question. Residents felt safe in telling me of their troubles in situations they otherwise would not have felt comfortable. I was seen as safe by most residents, though my intimate friendships with some did cause antagonistic relations with other neighborhood residents, perhaps prompted by troubles talk itself. Thanks to my presence there, community bloomed and flourished, growing in its intensity. Though nevertheless maintaining an enduring presence in the neighborhood, community has certainly decreased as a documented entity in Shady Grove due to my departure.

Mechanisms I employed led to the emergence of community. As a fieldworker, I saw and heard the work of community construction by tenants. As I sat and talked with Mike and Margaret Williams, or maybe alone with Donna, my participation, as fieldworker, friend, and confidant, invoked conversations though which community could be heard.

As noted earlier, Shady Grovers were forthright in expressing to me their troubles. Particular residents such as Donna were chastised, or at least talked of negatively, for working to develop a relationship that was beyond the acceptable level of intimacy. As an outsider, I was seen by many of the residents as someone they could vent their own troubles to.

Intimacy, Possession, and Ownership

Let's focus first on intimate relationships established between particular residents

and the fieldworker, and the ways that this lead to possessiveness by members of Shady

Grove. The talk surrounding this area is involved and connected with the female residents

of the neighborhood. This was often concerned with the "presumed involvement"

between Donna and me. At a point early in the fieldwork, Donna and I discussed her

various medical problems and our enjoyment of walking together. As we discussed our

walking arrangements, Donna alluded to the overall community of Shady Grove ("people

are talking") and its discussion of our presumed relationship:

Donna:	Chris, you know, we're going to have to slow this walking together down. People are talking about us.
Chris:	What are they saying?
Donna:	They're just talking [waves her hand in front of her face and rolls her eyes], "Look at her, taking that young guy walking all the time."
Chris:	Who's saying this? Come on Donna, who is it? Tell me!
Donna:	Oh, don't worry about it. They're just talking about it.

As Donna documents above, many female Shady Grovers claimed that our walks

proved that she possessed me. Dan had brought this same topic up in an earlier

conversation that we had, most likely due to his own connections with Mike and Donna at

"the meeting place." In one conversation, Opal referred to me as "Donna's special

buddy." In Donna's view, the trouble is with those who are "just jealous." Her troubles

talk points towards other residents, as a group, and their own troubles talk regarding the

relationship between Donna and me.

The relationship and her presumed intimate "ownership" of me intertwined with the dual concerns of age and ownership. Listen as Donna, Mike and I talk of the troubles of age and its implications:

Chris:	I'm getting old.
Mike:	Oh, come on. How old are you?
Chris:	Okay. I'm 31, but I look a lot younger, don't I?
Donna:	Yes. Without a doubt.
Mike:	Chris was here when I moved in 12 year ago. He remembers me from then. I'm just starting to remember him. You know what he said? Mike, you probably don't recognize me, I actually had hair then [laughs]. What a hoot! I'm only 28. That's 82 backwards. My age is . . . what do you call it? Dyslexic.
Donna:	Well, I'm only 15. [Everyone laughs] That's what happens when you get a 14-year old heart.
Mike:	That's right. Donna's young and frisky now. You better watch out Donna, don't take my boyfriend. I'd have to get fightin' mad. [Everyone laughs].

When the women of the complex gather together the conversation often turns, in a humorous manner, toward Donna's and my relationship. Though joking, the women nevertheless imply that they are certainly jealous of Donna. In regards to Donna, another resident noted, "she only got to you first Chris, that's why you always with her." Opal, specifically alluding to Donna's "ownership," once commented that, "Donna thinks she's got you Chris. Locked you all up with her walking [winks]. Well, wait till I get hold of you [laughs]."

In one particular instance, while three female Shady Grovers and I helped Margaret Thomas move out, Roy, a male resident of the complex walked by at a very slow pace. He seemed to be concentrating very hard as he walked, staring down at his feet. He paid no notice to the women, even though we were no more than 15 feet from

him. Shaking her head, Margaret Thomas remarked, "another good for nuthin' old man out here." All the women laughed and Margaret commented further, "we need some young ones just like you Chris. Need some just like you so Donna can't grab them all up [group laughs]." Opal concluded the short conversation, grounding my relationship with Donna in a direct reference to the troubles the women suffer, "we got too many problems. Those young guys wouldn't have anything to do with us . . . too many problems."

The lesson here is that actual social presence and field relations of the observer can be a source of talk. And, to the extent there are varied perspectives on these relations, especially those figuring the relations to be a problem, there is troubles talk. As a result, the observer can enhance this form of communication. Still, it isn't adding something new to the setting, only magnifying its relations, opinions, and talk. As Margaret Thomas' remarks suggest, my presence as a younger man--something to talk about--only added to the local brew of talk about others, such as the "good for nuthin' old man out there."

Venting Frustration

But, originally, I was not the only one who was privy to frustrations. Many others were vented to. Still, my presumed detachment did enhance my status as a good listener for troubles. I was seen by most residents of Shady Grove as someone with whom they could talk to if they had troubles.

The residents would confide in me, telling me of their troubles and the problems they were having with others in the neighborhood. To these Shady Grovers, I was a safe target for complaints. Though seen by most as being closely connected with Donna, I had worked to construct a number of independently close friends in the complex. As friends

often do, they would tell me of events, of likes and dislikes. However, in addition to being a friend, I was also, regardless of my long-term presence in the neighborhood, an outsider, one without the firm, long standing relationships with residents. I did not have allegiances to be honored and was not seen by residents as someone who would "spread damn rumors." The result was that most talked to me of their problems, often when they were angry and upset with other residents.

Many times, residents' frustrations extended to the housing authority. On one particular afternoon, Donna was irritated and frustrated about her worsening medical troubles. While we talked, she became very upset, even crying, as we talked of her problems. Telephoning the housing authority, she angrily complained that they were providing her with only a six dollars per month reduction in rent for her exuberant medical costs.

> This just isn't right. All these other people here, I know some of them are making more than me and they pay less in rent, like $50. Some even have children living with them and their money doesn't even count.

I informed Donna that the housing authority was governed by the rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Because of this, specific formulas are prescribed that determine what each resident's monthly charges are. The housing authority has very little say in resident's monthly rental rates in Shady Grove. However, Donna was extremely upset and silently sobbed, tears welling from her eyes. In a frustrated and downtrodden tone, she stated:

> I know Chris. But it isn't right. I worked my whole damn life, excuse me, for this insurance, and I still have to pay to keep it going. These other people don't pay a damn thing and they make more money than I do. What good is it to report it?

> They aren't going to change anything. The housing authority knows all about the stuff that goes on out here, and they won't even get my rent right and let all these other people get away with everything.

Though Donna was quite aware that I often spoke with Ms. Thompson, the executive director, and other housing authority staffers, she still speaks of her troubles and frustrations. In her troubles talk, community emerges through the discriminating policies of the housing authority. Well aware of what she perceives as the practices of the housing authority, she states, "the housing authority knows all about the stuff that goes on out here, and they won't even get my rent right."

Tenant Helen provides another example. Helen keeps to herself and rarely, if ever, speaks with other Grovers. Other female residents ridicule Helen, referring to her as "snooty," "stuck up," and as Opal suggested one time, "a pain-in-the-ass bitch."

One meeting, in particular, stands out. Helen had called the housing authority and requested my help in fixing various electrical appliances in her unit. As I worked on her television we began to chat. The subject of how she came to Shady Grove arose. Helen had moved to Florida from New England to be near relatives in St. Petersburg. Since her initial move to the state, illness forced her to relocate to Shady Grove. She needed the close proximity of a Veteran's Administration medical center. I agreed with her that the move to Shady Grove "certainly made sense." Here, Helen launches into a frustrated tirade against Shady Grove and its residents.

Helen:	But I'm moving again. I need to be where there are more activities for senior citizens. Up here? Nothing. Too many college students running around and I really don't really have any friends here. They either live in Boston or around the Tampa area.
Chris:	You don't have any friends here in Shady Grove?

| Helen: | God no [said loudly]. I don't know. Me and these people just don't seem to get along. To be honest, I just plain don't like any of them. I could do without them all. I'm just ready to move out of this place and go home to Boston. |

Helen's frustration over her present living situation in Shady Grove is clear. While conversing with me, she is able to share details of her life and her personal feelings towards the Grove that she cannot with residents. While she can avoid tenants or speak condescendingly to particular ones, she cannot address Shady Grovers en masse as being troublesome. Since I am a fieldworker, not a resident, she feels safe in communicating with me her problems with the neighborhood. In the process, she draws all residents into her troubles talk.

Talk About Talk

Grovers not only talked troubles, but frequently talked <u>about</u>, and expressed opinions over troubles talk. This reflexivity talk, at times, could present tenants as a virtual community of talk, not only talking community into being but also affecting the shape of its construction.

In Atkinson and Silverman's (1997) term, The Grove took on the semblance of an "interview society." Beset with programs and personalities such as Geraldo Rivera, Rosie O'Donnell, and Joan Rivers, we are constantly exposed to a steady stream of information from interviews by celebrities. Much of what we hear in the interviews and what is subsequently discussed comes to us in the form of gossip and, indeed, troubles.

According to Bergmann (1993), this is based in what he terms, "gossip about well-known persons." On a wider, cultural level, we have the nationally and internationally famous. In regards to this group,

> gossip . . . is driven commercially into forms of presentation that are developed specifically for this purpose. We can mention the "personality columns" of serious newspapers, investigative reporters of the tabloid journals, or diverse video-magazines and talk shows on TV. These mass media forms of the dissemination of gossip-information make up, simply because of their modality, a genre-family of their own. (Bergmann 1993:51)

What has always existed at a more mundane, everyday level, such as at Shady Grove, has now been globalized, so that the media itself can construct a community of troubles talk. In this, famous people, such as the celebrities of Shady Grove, Donna and Orin, are produced and reproduced through a gossip embedded in face-to-face interaction located in a network of ongoing social relations. Looked down on as trivial at best, seen as "tale-telling" (Coates 1996), or "chatter," or "babble," gossip has rarely been considered by social scientists as a topic worthy of special consideration. However, "gossip is by no means empty and meaningless prattle as is normally assumed in everyday experience but, on the contrary, fulfills important social functions for the preservation of the social group" (Bergmann 1993:144). Gossip serves as a social control mechanism through a vigilant checking on and enforcement of conformative behavior. To engage in activities that are the very source of gossip, is to engage in troubling or problematic activities that disrupt the moral code of the culture.

However, this communicative social control mechanism, this endless talk, also becomes problematic to those being talked about. To the "man in the street," or the

"well-informed citizen," as Schutz termed the knowing individual, a social knowledge of this talk becomes a trouble in and of itself. Here the troubles talk of Shady Grove residents emerges, explicitly concerned with troubles talk. In Shady Grove, I served as a listener to this "complaining about complaining," a safe haven of gossip refutation and condemnation. As I became a functioning and capable member of certain social groups in Shady Grove, I was privy to the trouble residents had with gossip and gossipers, all the while serving as gossipers themselves.

The talk about the troubles with gossip, in almost all cases, seemed to focus around the gossip of Shady Grovers as a group, not particular residents, though this certainly occurred. A concern with Shady Grovers as a whole often arose during casual conversation, many times in relation to possible intimate relations I with residents, particularly Donna. Though told in a joking manner, it nevertheless reinforces an ongoing concern with gossip.

In this regard, listen to Donna, Diane, and me as we stand in the parking lot by Donna's unit talking. Donna had just returned from an afternoon walk and was casually dressed in a light warm-up suit.

Chris:	Hey Donna, how are you doing?
Donna:	Good Chris. I just went walking around. Got to keep moving [laughs while performing some mini jumping jacks].
Chris:	Where'd you go this time?
Donna:	Oh, I took our normal route and then walked around and down to Eckerd to buy something.
Chris:	Well, you want to go walking tomorrow?
Donna:	Yeah, that'd be nice.
Diane:	Oh no, here they go again. The women are going to start talking. This whole place is going to be in an uproar [laughs]. Chris, your

girlfriend know about us old ladies out here? This hanging out with us? We're trouble you know.

The social control implications of gossip are clear. Impending, not existing, gossip shapes social interaction. But more important as far as community is concerned, the pending scenario implicates social order, especially a sense of what "we should be" rather than what it looks like "what we're becoming." Here, community comes into its own, as the proverbial "what the community might think" or "would say" looms forth in talk about talk.

A similar conversation with Mike, Donna, and me occurred in the same parking lot. The ladies spoke of my presence in the neighborhood as a driving force for gossip. I was rapidly becoming a topic of considerable conversation in the neighborhood, most notably among the women. The trouble with talk here surrounds my presence in Shady Grove and Mike's own concerns about other Shady Grovers. The conversation begins after tenant Margaret Williams has left the group to return to her unit.

Mike:	That lady don't like me.
Donna:	Her? Don't pay no mind to her, she's just a little strange.
Mike:	I can tell she don't like me though. Look at her scurrying off like that [points in Margaret Williams' direction as she enters her unit]. I'm just the way I am and some people don't like that. But I've always been this way and I ain't gonna change now. That's just the way it is. But some people like to talk and say things about me. I don't pay 'em no mind though.
Donna:	Oh yeah, some of these women talk, bad and good. If something happens here it is the talk of the town. You already are Chris.
Chris:	Oh great. I've always wanted to be the talk of the town [Donna and Mike laugh].
Mike:	Don't pay 'em no mind. A new man comes in here, especially a young one, and they all get in a titter. I stay out of all this [elaborates].

Margaret Williams provides us with another example. Ms. Williams and I were discussing Donna and her declining health. Specifically, Margaret was talking of a recent incident in which she checked to see how Donna was "feeling." Listen as Margaret weaves this, Donna's troubles, and her own troubles, with gossip among Shady Grovers:

> So I knock, and I see her lying here on the couch sound asleep. I mean a deep sleep. She woke up and was all groggy, like you are, ya know, when you first wake up. I told her that I was sorry but that I didn't see her and was worried so I wanted to check on her. She's a nice person. I don't have any trouble with her unlike the rest of the people out here. A bunch of gossips Chris! I don't have anything to do with them and I don't want them to have anything to do with me. God do they talk [waves her arms in air]! You say one thing and it spreads like wildfire. Everyone knows about it. It's shameful.

Margaret ends our conversation as another resident, Erica, walks by in the parking lot, directly in front of Margaret's unit. Erica has recently suffered a broken foot. In a bitter voice, Margaret comments on the trouble with gossip in Shady Grove:

> They say that woman's an alcoholic. That she drinks too much. Who cares? She's old enough. It's her business. She always has empty liquor bottles in her recycling bin. But she puts them right out there. Good for her! If she wants to drink, it's her business and no one else's. All these busybodies out here though, they got to talk about something all the time. Guess they have to find something to talk about, so they talk about her.

Conclusion

Ethnography is necessarily deeply embedded in the everyday relations between all setting participants. The fieldworker, as part of his or her trade, is required to immerse him or herself in the complex social world of a research site. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) note, "the ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important" (p. 2; emphasis in original). In so doing, a certain level of interpersonal intimacy results between the researcher and

other participants. Berk and Berheide (1977) speak to this achieved intimate level of

discourse in their study of housework, telling us that,

> in particular, we were often treated as new friends in whom subjects seemed
> prepared to invest substantial affect. While this process was difficult to document
> when access was initially being negotiated, once we entered people's homes we
> were offered coffee, engaged in conversational ice-breaking topics of conversation,
> and soon questioned in a friendly manner about our personal lives (e.g. Where in
> town do you live? Do you have any children?). Often it was not long before we
> were told about difficult personal experiences (e.g. medical problems) and various
> life complaints . . . What was most striking about these conversations was the
> speed with which they unfolded. Perhaps subjects wanted to remove the
> ambiguous elements of our role as soon as possible; the uncertainty was extremely
> uncomfortable. Alternatively, there was something about the behavior we were
> going to observe which demanded rapid movement to a more intimate level of
> interaction. (Pp. 36-37; as cited in Emerson 1983:241)

The authors alert us to the all-encompassing relations of the field and its personal

dimensions as well. According to Emerson (1983), this is readily observable when the

researcher gains entry to, "[the] more intimate, sensitive, or backstage areas of group and

subjects' social world" (p. 240). By achieving this level of entry, the researcher both

discovers and enhances emergent phenomenon. In the case of Shady Grove, it was the

relationship between troubles talk and community. My presence there provided an

impetus for the increased visibility of community there. Upon my departure, it has most

likely receded.

As a result, this consequential presence should not be seen as, "contaminating

what is observed and learned" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:3). Rather, the

fieldworker's entry into the social situation, the world of the members, does not disrupt

ongoing patterns of social interaction, but instead serves to illuminate the ties and social

order already in place. By achieving deeply embedded social relations with members,

clues are provided that lead one to a deeper understanding of, "the more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through observation or research methods" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:3).

CHAPTER 8
WHERE THIS TAKE US: CYBER-COMMUNITY, HASSLES, AND NARRATIVE PRACTICE

Where have we ended up and where do we go from here? I have told a rather long story of community and troubles talk and their intersection in a senior public housing neighborhood called Shady Grove. We have heard the residents' troubles with cats, with their neighbors, with their friends, and with the housing authority. Seemingly, we have heard everything there is to actually hear about the everyday life of Shady Grove. But this can't be all there is. It certainly is not. Community has pushed onward. New theories of community and the increasing presence of the Internet in our everyday lives, both the young and the old, push the boundaries of how we conceive of community. Gerontological work into the difficulties of old age points us in a new direction for troubles talk. And lastly, narrative analysis, or what Gubrium and Holstein (1997; Holstein and Gubrium 2000) conceptualize as narrative practice, directs our attention to the many things that troubles talk accomplishes. What Durkheim, Tonnies, Emerson, and Messinger initially conceived of has led to a convergence of two phenomena thought to be impossibly merged--troubles and community. It is where these both converge and separate that I turn.

Locating Community in a Modern World

Speaking as a communitarian, Amitai Etzioni (1991) argues that,

> the consensus of sociological and psychological work supports the basic notion
> that isolation--whether the product of urbanization, mass society, or other
> phenomena--erodes the mental stability necessary for individuals to form their own
> judgements and resist undue external pressure and influence. Thus, individuals
> require community; without it, they are diminished if not incapacitated. (P. 141)

Etzioni takes us down a romantic path towards a place where balance is achieved
between individual rights and the rights of the society as a whole. Habermas presents
these same romantic leanings in his search for an emancipated society, one dependent on
the capacity of individuals to be reasonable and rational through communicative action and
"valid agreement," in a communicative sphere of legitimized discourse.

Here, I proposed no such romantic ideal of an unproblematic "we-ness." The
residents of Shady Grove, I think, have no clear sense of what would constitute balance
between their wants and needs and the overall good of the neighborhood, the housing
authority, or especially society. No concern is expressed by Shady Grovers beyond the
wants of themselves and a few other residents. Instead, community in Shady Grove is
constructed around its ordinary problems, which I have argued is conveyed in ongoing
troubles talk. Community in Shady Grove is a localized, practical accomplishment built
around residents taking one another into account as they go about their daily lives. If any
balance is achieved, it is as shifting and fleeting as the talk that constructs it.

Still, the sense of a balance is there; the sense that some accommodation needs to
be made between individual preferences and actions on the one hand, and what The Grove

is or should be on the other. This highlights the moral entity that community must be, a setting in which all are not strangers, but accountable to each other.

If talk relates significantly to community formation, where do we go from here? Is this relation being globalized? The Internet has emerged as a radical vehicle for the progression of democracy and community. It is possible that here is where we might find community most viably emergent in talk. We have long since left the notion of the geographic community, and computers may only be another step towards enhancing community built around non face-to-face interaction.

Computer Mediated Communication

Computer networks, once obscure and arcane technology, are now widely used by the public, and are the subject of much debate, both politically and in popular culture. Outbreaks of mass violence in school, such as recent incidents like that at Columbine, have focused increased political attention on the Internet and the role that it plays in disseminating information. Increasingly, this medium is being used to connect people-to-people.

> People have formed thousands of groups to discuss a range of topics, play games, entertain one another, and even work on a range of complex collective projects. These are not only communication media--they are group media, sustaining and supporting many-to-many interactions. (Licklider et al. 1978; Harasim 1993; as cited in Kollock and Smith 1999:3)

Extensive debate has arisen over whether this person-to-person or group-to-group interaction constitutes a community, and if it does, what damage does it cause to the traditional community, so romanticized in both popular culture and sociological literature (Wellman and Gulia 1999)? Proponents of the community-work of the Internet include

Vice President Al Gore. They suggest that communicative social spaces will be created where citizens can come together in various forms of assemblage that promote democracy and social contact. Others argue that the Internet is breeding a society in which face-to-face interaction is greatly reduced, thereby destroying a sense of "we-ness" and common belonging.

It is indeed interesting that the Internet and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has sparked such a debate. Since the inception of the discipline, sociologists have wondered about the ways in which technological and industrial change alter and affect community (Wellman 1988). Up until the 1950's, sociologists concerned themselves with the increased acceleration of modernization and the presumed increase of weak, disconnected relationships that this would spawn (Stein 1960). However, the work of researchers such as Herbert Gans (1962) showed that community persisted in localized geographic settings and among kinship groups, even as society modernized. We discovered that increased means of faster transportation and perhaps most importantly the telephone, allowed individuals to maintain strong community networks over large geographical distances (Wellman 1988). The community as a strictly geographical, place-oriented phenomenon began to break down. With increased communication technology, one could maintain strong social networks of friends and family, for example, across geographical boundaries and distance. As Wellman (1988) notes, "this conceptual revolution moved from defining community in terms of space--neighborhoods--to defining it in terms of social networks" (p. 42; as cited in Smith and Kollock 1999:169).

The traditional village-like community, so idealized, has not emerged as envisioned in the Western world. Instead of community members providing extensive and needed wide range support to others, as a traditional village model would hold, social ties are specialized and independent. Because of this, the ties do not lead to a dense weaving of relationships. Thus, the village-like community is no more.

This is not to say that support does not exist. It certainly does, but in different ways. Varied forms of support, whether economic, emotional, or informational, are available to members of a community. In cases where help is needed in some way, the community member will turn to another individual for assistance. This, as theoretical postulates hold, establishes needed, broadly based networks of relationships. As Smith and Kollock (1999) so eloquently state, "[individuals] must shop at specialized boutiques for needed resources instead of casually dropping in at a general store" (p. 171; as cited in Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Exemplary of this growth is the rapidly increasing number of online support groups. These groups provide electronic support for social, physical, and mental problems. As an example, Foderaro (1995) researched the efforts of an online support group for women going through menopause, and the emotional support provided to them. Groups have come together online dealing with issues from drug and alcohol addiction, compulsive gambling, and epilepsy (such as EpiNet), and have increased rapidly in number over a short period of time. Often, individuals who participate in "real-life" support groups are encouraged to involve themselves in online ones as well (King 1994). This expands their circle of support beyond the boundaries of the real-life one.

This same phenomenon has occurred among seniors. Support groups for those providing caregiving to the elderly have greatly expanded, perhaps most notably for those caregiving for loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's and indeed even those individuals at the early onset of diagnosed Alzheimer's Disease.

The experience of SeniorNet is most notable in terms of intimacy, support and the elderly. It is a site where seniors can group, find, and share information relevant to themselves. In a survey of those regularly accessing SeniorNet, nearly half (47%) had joined SeniorNet to find companionship and support. Over a four-month period, the heavily used features of the site were, "e-mail, 'forum,' and 'conferencing' (social uses) while such information access features as 'news,' 'bulletin board, 'library,' and 'database' were the least used" (Smith and Kollock 1999:173). Peer counselors are available to the elderly at all times of the day and companionship is readily accessed and enjoyed. SeniorNet has unintentionally spawned a large and vibrant senior community.

While online research does pose an ethical quandary (Thomas, personal communication), it nevertheless is a vital enterprise for those interested in studying contemporary developments of community. The Internet, chat groups, e-mail, news groups, bulletin board systems, MUDs, and MOOs all represent the seemingly endless forms of CMC through which community can be constructed online. A paucity of research into community has been performed however, even though as Smith and Kollock argue (1999), "it provides a level of access to the details of social life and a durability of the traces of social interaction that is unprecedented" (p. 4).

Troubles Talk and Its Constructions

While the research performed here delves into the methods through which troubles talk works to construct community, it is certainly not limited to this field. Troubles talk serves as such a mundane feature of everyday life. Yet beyond conversation analysis it has received scant attention in sociology. If one were to think about it, though, where and when do troubles not permeate our talk? As friends, we listen to others tell us of their troubles with their partner. As parents we hear children talk of how horribly they are being treated by their teacher. As sociologists we complain and listen to complaints from others about their work or the political culture of a department. In short, we cannot escape troubles or the talk that swirls around them. We have seemingly provided different analytical vocabulary for the talk, such as gossip, thereby differentiating it from "normal" talk. However, this may not be the case at all. Troubles talk might be our normal talk.

Here I point in two directions that troubles talk takes us. One deals with a substantive area of aging research. This relates to everyday life in old age, something which bears directly on residents' troubles talk in Shady Grove--the growing concern with hassles in gerontological research. The second focuses attention on narrative, specifically narrative practice (Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 2000), as a way of analytically approaching troubles talk.

The Trouble with Hassles

In the past two decades gerontologists have increasingly turned their attention to hassles. Hassles are defined as, "daily events that are appraised by individuals as exceeding their resources, and therefore threatening well-being" (Kinney et al. 1995: 4; Lazarus and

Folkman 1984). The interest in hassles has focused attention on the stress of family caregiving for stroke patients (Kinney et al. 1995), the psychological distress of elderly widows (Pellman 1992; Voyer and Vezina 1995), and the health status of pensioners (Laird and Chamberlin 1990). As noted in the Introduction, scales have been carefully constructed by researchers to quantitatively measure hassles. These include the "Hassles Scale" (Kanner et al. 1981), and the "Caregiving Hassles and Uplifts Scale" (Kinney and Stephens 1989a).

Exemplary of hassles research is the recent work of Kinney, Stephens, Franks, and Norris (1995). The authors study the hassles of caring for stroke patients by immediate family. They focus on the specific hassles related to caring for a family member following a stroke, "aiming to document the relationships among hassles, uplifts and three indices of caregiver well-being: restrictions in caregivers' social activities, negative social relationships and depression" (Kinney et al. 1995:5). Based on the results of their study, the authors conclude that,

> in terms of the protective effects of uplifts, findings from this study revealed a complex relationship between caregiving hassles, uplifts and caregivers' well-being. Overall, hassles were the strongest predictors of well-being, and were consistently found to relate directly, in a negative direction, to all three indices of well-being. (Kinney et al. 1995:17)

This complex relationship is not surprising if one takes into account that hassles, or uplifts, are interactionally achieved. Embedded in troubles talk, hassles are continually renegotiated and redefined, dependent on context and working objective(s). What might be considered a hassle at the time of engagement, such as a "bad day" by the care recipient, may later be seen as humorous or, "really not so bad," possibly now being

redefined as an uplift. Given the exclusion of interactional achievement, hassle scales

point in a direction that leads us away from a concern with practical achievement and

towards a temporally staid attitudinal recognition, devoid of interactional characteristics.

Troubles talk alerts us to the fluidity and contours of hassles. Comments by Shady

Grovers point to the temporally significant features of hassles. Follow Donna as she talks

of her friends and enemies in Shady Grove:

> Chris, I don't have any friends in this place. All these people here, and not a single
> friend. Opal, Mike, none of them. Dan's my friend, but I mean women friends.
> Opal is my friend, but she really isn't my friend. I told her one day that I didn't
> have any friends here and she looked me in the eyes and said, "No Donna, I guess
> you don't." How you like that? [I shake my head] That's the way I like it too. I
> don't want anything to do with these people anymore. I live here, I see them, and
> I know what they are doing. They don't think I know, but I listen.

Donna was in the midst of severe depression when she talked to me of her hassles

with those she had previously considered friends. Indeed, this itself speaks to the

temporally specific nature of hassles. Previously, the women she mentioned had been her

closest friends and now, due to specific contingencies brought on by depression, they are

no longer intimates. In a conversation that took place between us after her depression had

subsided, she reminded me of what she had said and that I, "shouldn't go telling anyone."

When pressed for a reason, she stated, "I've been thinking about it, and they helped me

out, I think."

Diane tells us the same when she talks of Ted, a maintenance worker, and how he

used to not be a hassle. However, his work has gotten much worse in the recent past,

"Ted used to not be so bad, you know. He used to do a great job, especially with the

really old ones out here. But now, he's just fallen apart. He went to some other complex,

and he comes back here and just does some half-ass job." In both cases, Diane and Donna

furnish examples that illustrate the artfulness of hassles construction and deconstruction,

and the contingencies of circumstance on which these rely.

However, the more important point as it relates to this dissertation is a rather

contrasting view of outcomes. For hassles researchers, hassles have negative outcomes.

The more hassles, the worse it is for the individuals's well being. But if one takes a social

view and asks what the communication of hassles do in relationships--as I do here--the

outcome can be more positive. It can form community.

Hassles research has yet to be extended in the direction of talk. My sense, based

on the findings of this dissertation, is that the results will be so complex as to eclipse its

current conceptualization, thereby problematizing its practice.

Troubles Talk and Narrative Practice

Here we end the tale of community and trouble in a section whose focus is truly

story. Research into story and the quality of live as a narrative production is now seen by

many as an accepted and valued method of approaching the composition of experience

(Gubrium 1993; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Josselson and

Lieblich 1993, 1995; Lieblich and Jossesslon 1994). Narrative is, as Susan Chase (1995)

urges, to be "taken seriously." Polkinghorne echoes these same sentiments when he notes,

"narrative is the <u>fundamental</u> scheme for linking individual human action and events into

interrelated aspects of an understandable composite" (1988:13; as cited in Gubrium and

Holstein 1997:147; emphasis added). Indeed, its usage is instrumental in disciplines as

diverse as history (Cronon 1992), education (Gee 1985; Mishler 1986), anthropology

(Turner 1981) and psychoanalysis (Schafer 1980).

Through the study and analysis of narrative, we gain insight into the way that

stories about experience are communicated, assembled, and made coherent. Focusing on

narrative, we are able to pay attention to <u>how</u> stories are told. Which experiences are

included and which are left out, how events are used or linked, and how the telling of

experience is framed to give meaning to the story. As Gubrium and Holstein (1997)

explain:

> As a meaning-making device, a narrative assembles individual objects, actions, and
> events into a comprehensive pattern; telling a story turns available parts into a
> meaningful whole. Contrasted with, say a mere list of objects or actions, a
> narrative can be seen to have a concerted order or structure, an orientation to the
> temporality of occurrences, and active, if flexible, linkages between elements.
> (P.147).

"Horizons of meaning" (Gubrium 1993) and "narrative linkages" serve as methods

to "meaningfully articulate stories" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:148). The way in which

stories are told, the <u>how</u> of their narration, provides a way for the researcher to see how,

through the highly complex organization of storytelling, the narrator comprehends the

diverse experiences of a life. According to Gubrium and Holstein (1997), the concept of

narrative linkage provides a way to see how respondents speak to their experiences as a

whole. It is the manner in which stories are "brought together and juxtaposed, combined

into a complex ensemble of objects and/or events that convey meaning" (1997:148).

Horizons of meaning are, in essence, patterns of narrative linkages. A focused order can

be determined within the story told by looking at the ways in which experiences are

grouped together, thereby providing a "wholeness" to the story. It is the recurring and ongoing linkages that the story works around and through, thereby framing the story itself.

By focusing on troubles and their articulation through narrative, we are taken in a different direction from conversation analysis. Exemplary of conversation analysis work in this area is that of Jefferson and Lee's (1981) on the "rejection of advice" in what they term, "service encounters." Using a developed analytic device, a "Troubles-Telling Sequence," the authors find that participants, in giving a common organization to their troubles talk, work to both rationalize their talk in these encounters as well as, "humanize their talk; to provide for it as more than a merely 'instrumental' exchange, with what turns out to be problematic attempts at reciprocity" (Jefferson and Lee 1981:546).

As an example, let's turn a narrative ear to these conversations. For example, in the conversation under study, the authors look at an exchange between two people as they work to determine the phone number of a third. From the orientation of conversation analysis, the significance of their talk is the manner in which the conversation is aligned around the third person, whose phone number is the trouble-at-hand. From a narrative practice stance, the same conversation can be analyzed to see how the resource of the phone number is used to give meaning to the third party. The third person, out of the conversation, could be considering as troubling, or used to veer the talk towards other, less problematic matters. The troubles talk in the conversation would shift around the third person resource, or the phone number itself, linking together various components of the narrative to construct an overall sense of meaning.

In Shady Grove, narrative analysis proves useful in understanding how the stories told by the Grovers convey troubles and the ways in which troubles are used to actually convey meaning. What resources are particularly useful in linking particular residents with culturally recognizable troubles? For example, closer attention might be paid to the narrative ways in which pets themselves are constructed as troubles. Or perhaps how tenant Mae and her cat are used as resources to give meaning to the lives of other residents who share her trouble. Opal provides us with an example with the following commentary on the relationship between tenant Margaret and her dog, stating that "Margaret acts just like Mae does with her cat."

Troubles talk and narrative also intersect in the form of troubled lives, an area of considerable importance for a sociology of aging. If, as I argue above, troubles talk permeates our everyday existence, and in fact may dominate our talk, it will also serve as a resource for biographical construction, both past and future. In various research into life course narratives of gay men and epileptics, Faircloth (1996, 1998, 1999) points us towards the significance of troubles in life course construction.

In his research with gay men, the author analyzes the means through which a heterosexist culture provides a narrative environment in which the life-stories of homosexual men can be articulated. This provides a sort of framework in which certain types of stories can be expected to be told by the men. Troubles permeate their talk.

Donald, a gay man, tells Faircloth about his efforts in concealing his sexuality from his parents while still a child. Listen to the troubles that arise and the ways they are used to weave together life and sexuality, his biography-at-work:

Donald: I did get caught by my mother one time, with John. My mom's response to me acting out sexually is just as vivid as the experiences themselves. She spanked me in his presence, sent John home, and made me sit on the sofa until she finished cleaning. She asked me, what were you doing with Johnny? And I told her what we were doing, the specific thing, and she asked me why, and I told her I didn't know. And I didn't. Nobody had ever given me any clues or hints on how to act out sexually. I was just doing something that came very natural. It was strange and odd, to be punished for something that I didn't even think there was anything wrong with. I don't think she even told my dad. If she did, there was never any follow-up with him. Ever.

Faircloth: Did you get caught again?

Donald: I also got caught with my cousin, too. We were in the bathroom, at a family dinner, and we didn't lock the door. And I guess we had been in there a little long, and his mom came in. It was interesting. She spanked him in front of me. I don't think there was ever any follow-up, or am even sure if she told my parents. Just this unfortunate embarrassment around sexuality.

The troubles are everywhere. They dominate Donald's narrative of

"concealment." In Donald's talk, we distinctly hear a heterosexist culture demanding the

hiding of his actions. It permeates the talk throughout. Embedded in this are the

practical, everyday concerns, or troubles of Donald. Hiding from his mom is "vivid," and

he can't figure out that at his age, what exactly the trouble is with his actions, "I didn't

even think there was anything wrong with [it]." According to Donald, further problems

arise. He is caught playing with his cousin, hiding in the bathroom. Donald ends with talk

about wider ideological concerns, or troubles, with sexual practice. His story is, in

essence, a tale of sexual trouble.

If we are to take narrative seriously, to pay close analytic attention to what it does,

then an intellectual curiosity points us towards the role of troubles in narrative and its

constructive aspects. As I suggest in the first chapter, "they must be doing something."

Donald's narrative was analyzed by Faircloth (1996) in terms of life-stories of gay men and their ability to actively make claims, but their stories could be read in ways that focus on everyday troubles. With the elderly, troubles talk and narrative might work to show a life played out through the interpretive resources of the troubles themselves. One might see a life-course constructed based on present troubles with staff at a nursing home, or with the domineering leader in a support group for those suffering from Alzheimer's. The troubles of the Depression, of war, perhaps a daughter dying, all serve as interpretive resources that give meaning and order to both the temporal past and the everyday present. Troubles talk brings the everyday realities of a life together.

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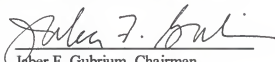
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Tallahassee, FL, Christopher Faircloth began his college education at the University of Florida in 1984. Upon completion of a B.A. in political science, he entered graduate school. In 1991, he completed his master's in urban and regional planning, again at the University of Florida, and promptly entered the workforce, this time in Tampa.
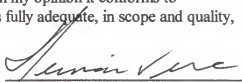
He soon returned to Gainesville and began working for local government. He pursued this for a number of years, but he yearned to return to school to further his education. So, continuing his eclectic approach to education, he entered the doctoral program in sociology.

Upon completion of the dissertation, he expects to continue teaching and research in an academic setting. His areas of interest include aging and the life-course, medical sociology, and social psychology. Specifically, he holds research interests in narrative, the experiential contours of chronic illness, and social interaction.
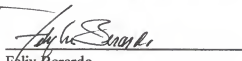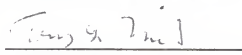
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Jaber F. Gubrium, Chairman
Professor of Sociology

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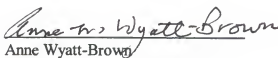
Hernan Vera
Professor of Sociology

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Teheran L. Mills
Assistant Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 2000

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Dean, Graduate School